



repentance, new life; if HE seem to call us not, we have the more need to pray HIM to unseal our dull ear, that we may hear His call, or even by some sore affliction call more loudly to us, that even "dead" as we are, we may "hear His Voice, and" hearing "live." As year by year rolls round, these gracious calls are either being exhausted, if we regard them not, or they are preparing for that last blissful call, when, in the hour of death, HE shall call nearest to His side those who obeyed His earliest calls, yet shall not shut out us, who, if we at first neglected or refused to work in our FATHER'S vineyard, afterwards "repented and went;"—that blissful call, which, it may be, with the memory of so many neglected calls, we shall scarce believe will belong to us; but to us also it shall be said, "Arise, be of good comfort, HE calleth thee;" to us also HE shall say at the awful day, "Come, ye blessed of MY FATHER, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

May HE give us all grace so to "hear His Voice and follow HIM" now, that our past neglect of His many, manifold calls and recalls, turn not to our condemnation, and "in the hour of death and Day of Judgment" may HE "deliver us."

END OF VOL. III.

Tracts con

PLAIN SERMONS,

BY

CONTRIBUTORS

TO THE

“TRACTS FOR THE TIMES.”

“ We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.

“ For we are glad when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection.”—2 Cor. xiii. 8, 9.

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SERMON XCIII.

OF NOT RECEIVING GOD'S GRACE IN VAIN.

2 COR. vi. 1.

“ We ... beseech you ... that ye receive not the Grace of God in vain.”

EVERY person who has read his prayer-book with any degree of attention, knows that this season of Lent is appointed by the Church for the especial exercise of repentance; that she intends us to refrain for a while even from the innocent pleasures of the world, that our time and thoughts may be the freer to consider our past lives, to bewail and confess our sins, and so prepare ourselves, with thankful hearts, to acknowledge the infinite mercies of God in CHRIST JESUS on the great days of His death and resurrection.

Now labouring men and poor men are apt to imagine that they have very little to do with such times as this: “ Fasting and abstinence, humiliation and self-denial, are very well for those who live in mirth and abundance, and ‘ fare sumptuously every day ;’ but we, whose lives are all poverty and toil, had need take all the pleasure we can find, and divert ourselves without fear or scruple, in Lent as well as at other times in the year.” And, upon the strength of such excuses as this, too many go on, neglecting their God and SAVIOUR, and burying themselves in thoughts of this world, throughout this holy season, with as little remorse or concern as they have done all the year besides.

But what is the real worth and value of this apology for the neglect of so sacred and useful an ordinance? It comes, when you consider it, to neither more nor less than this: that they cannot or will not govern their own thoughts, and turn them more earnestly than usual towards eternal things, in order that they may be the readier to keep Good Friday and Easter as they ought to be kept. For the reason why fasting and abstinence is good at this season, is no merit or goodness in the fasting and abstinence themselves, but because they are useful helps to us in diverting our thoughts from vain cares and pleasures, and fixing them on eternal things. *That* is what the Church wants; *that* is the use of Lent, for which we shall be called to account at the last day: and if we be too sick or too poor to change our usual diet and mode of living, still we are not the less bound, at this holy season, to do that for the sake of which others are called to mortify their bodies. The poorest man is just as much bounden as the richest, to use Lent for his help, in repenting truly of his former sins. He may turn his thoughts that way more earnestly than he has been used to do; may spend a little more time in his prayers, and strive more incessantly to keep up his attention while he is praying. Surely no one can imagine that such discipline and self-denial as this, carefully persisted in all through the forty days of Lent, would be of no use in making a man a truer penitent, and a worthier communicant at Easter.

He who desires thus to improve himself, cannot begin better, than by deeply meditating on the weighty and overpowering call to repentance contained in the words of the text. "We," (*i. e.* the ministers of JESUS CHRIST) "as workers together with HIM, beseech you also, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain."

The words are awful enough in themselves, and calculated to go deep into every heart which has any sense of God, any natural piety within it. Consider: we stand in the presence of the great and unspeakable God, who fills Heaven and earth; and not only do we, in common with all his creatures, stand in His presence, but we are likewise objects of His especial care; His eye is upon us for our good; we have received favour and grace from HIM; we know HE means our happiness. Can anything be more startling than the thought, that, after all this, we may fail and be miserable? And yet such we see is the case. Nay,

not only is the thing possible, but it will surely take place if we are left to ourselves. We have need of exhortation ; we want an Apostle to come and beseech us that we receive not the favour of the ALMIGHTY in vain.

All this surely ought to make a serious impression upon us, though we knew nothing of the way in which God's favour had been reached out to us. A Gentile might feel it on recollecting His natural mercies, His ways of Providence and preservation ; the rain HE gives us from Heaven and the fruitful seasons, His filling our hearts with food and gladness. A Jew might feel it, when reflecting on the peculiar kindness shown to the family of Israel ; he might reasonably say to himself, " What if I, who am one of God's favoured people, should lose His favour and miscarry at last by my own fault ? will it not be ten times worse with me than it will be with the worst of heathens ? "

But if a Jew or a Gentile might talk thus with himself, much more those to whom St. Paul is speaking in the text ; much more we Christians. If we would know what infinite reason we have to be very full of anxiety for our own souls, we must look and see what that Grace of God is, which we are here said to have received, and for which, if received in vain, we shall one day find ourselves answerable. We must look back a few sentences in the Apostle's letter, and read as follows : " HE died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto HIM which died for them and rose again." " God was in CHRIST reconciling the world unto Himself." " HE hath made HIM to be sin for us, Who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in HIM. We then, as workers together with HIM—we also beseech you that ye receive not the favour of God in vain ; " the unutterable favour of God in giving His SON to die for you, in reconciling the world unto Himself, in making HIM to be sin for us, who knew no sin, and in making us, in HIM, the Righteousness of God : that is, joining us to HIM by His SPIRIT. This favour, even the Gift of eternal life through JESUS CHRIST, is received by every Christian : but it may be received in vain ; in vain, that is, as to the salvation of the particular person receiving it ; for doubtless there may be other purposes, unknown to us, which Almighty God accomplishes by making His word known to those who refuse to obey

it. But those are secrets of GOD, with which we have nothing to do ; what concerns us at present, is to reflect, with all possible attention and seriousness, upon our own awful and dangerous condition. For we have received this grace of GOD. His SON has died for us, and we know it. His SPIRIT has entered into our hearts and made us members of CHRIST. HE has poured out for our sake all the treasures of His mercy ; daily and hourly HE offers to bestow upon us more and more of His HOLY SPIRIT : and if all this prove at last in vain, what can we think or expect ? what can we think of ourselves, or what expect from GOD ?

Surely those who have any spark of consideration left, must be roused and animated by such thoughts as these, to examine whether they are not, at this moment, receiving the grace of GOD in vain. For it is certain, that every instance of outward communion in Christian ordinances—every time we read a chapter, or say a prayer, or go to Church, and, most of all, every time we receive the Holy Communion without being really the better for it, is an instance of our receiving the Grace of GOD in vain. And if we pass our lives in such a course, how can we expect to be the better for that Grace when we come to die ?

I do not mean that every time we go to Church we must expect to *feel* better than we had done before : but I mean, that if, upon fairly examining our own conduct, we do not find, that by degrees we are growing better, the warning of the Apostle comes very near us ; and we have great reason to fear for our own present and eternal condition,

When any person is pointed out to us, who never comes near the Church, never opens a good book, never even professes to turn his mind to meditation and prayer, we fancy we know at once what to think of that man. We have no scruple in setting him down for one of those to whom the Grace of GOD, which was meant for salvation, will bring no salvation at last, unless a complete change take place in all his principles and ways. And, in passing censures of this kind, we are too apt to draw silent comparisons with ourselves, as if, because they are wrong, we are sure to be right.

But, perhaps, though we are regular at Divine Service, we feel no real concern, no serious interest in it. Perhaps we are glad when it is over, and pleased to be at liberty to run wild again

after the bustle and business of an irreligious world. Perhaps we make no steady effort to keep our thoughts and our words together when we are saying our prayers to God. If such be our case, it is high time for us to leave off censuring others, and take the beam out of our own eyes.

I will make one allowance more. I will suppose that we really do pay something like regular and serious attention to the ordinances in which we draw near to God. I will suppose, that for the time we really wish to please HIM, and that it would make us truly unhappy and uncomfortable to suppose ourselves out of His favour. Yet the great proof of our sincerity remains to be given; *i. e.* the amendment of our lives; and that, especially in the following particulars, in which men, endowed with a certain degree of right feeling in religion, are, I think, most apt to go wrong.

First, In the government of our thoughts and imaginations. Men are apt sometimes to fancy, that if they *do* right, they may *think* as they please. But this is surely an inexcusable mistake; for it is supposing God to take no account of their thoughts; of which, as much as of any thing else, we may be sure HE takes the strictest account; for the order and government of our thoughts proves what we really are more distinctly than any thing else. In thinking, we are alone with God, and the ordering of our thoughts aright is neither more nor less than behaving rightly towards HIM.

Consider, then, whether your improvement in this respect has been answerable to the means of grace which Almighty God has mercifully afforded you. Consider whether, when left to yourself, you naturally begin meditating on heavenly things, the presence of God, the mercies of CHRIST, the hopes and fears of Eternity; or whether you start aside (like a broken bow, as the Psalmist says,) to the vanities and amusements which happen to lie most in your way. To be sure, what we think of most, that in our hearts we must love best; and we ought not to be satisfied with our own devotion of heart, till we find our thoughts returning of their own accord towards Heaven, whenever they have been interrupted by any worldly call or anxiety.

Secondly, To know whether we are quite sincere in receiving the grace of God, we must consider whether we are the better for

it in our daily discourse and conversation with other men. Not that we are to be always talking of religious subjects ; but since one of the most necessary truths for a Christian to believe is the corruption of the heart and tongue, it is impossible but one, who has a true and an increasing sense of it, must be more and more on his guard that he offend not in words. He must be more afraid every day of lying and dissimulation, of violent and reproachful language, of filthiness and foolish talking, of inconsiderate slander and calumny. This will perhaps be the very surest sign and mark by which a sincere man may satisfy his own conscience, that he is really the better for the inestimable love of God in making and keeping him a Christian.

I say, he will be particularly on his guard against slander and calumny in *words* ; and for this reason, among others, he will watch and stop the entrance of his heart against slanderous and calumnious *thoughts*. He will always endeavour to believe and hope the best that he possibly can of his neighbour's conduct ; for if he once give way to uncharitable suspicions within, hardly any caution will enable him to keep himself from doing harm to his neighbour's character, when he comes to speak of him. His real opinion will betray itself, unkind hearers will make the worst of it, and thus our brother's fair fame may suffer more than we can ever repay him, for want of a little seasonable charity in our own deceitful hearts. Therefore, as I said before, one of the best signs of our not receiving God's grace in vain will be this : that we have become more mild and charitable in the construction we put on our neighbour's conduct, and always hope the best till we are forced to believe the worst.

Many indeed would reply, that this is out of their power ; that they wish indeed to believe the best, but they have been so often disappointed, have met with so much wickedness, that they cannot help growing more suspicious as they grow older. But it is worth their while to ask themselves, whether they have not quite as often found themselves deceived by judging too unfavourably of others as by thinking too well of them ? Whether they have not, in very many instances, accounted this or that man wicked and unprincipled, when in fact he was only weak and wavering ? If they would examine themselves fairly on this point, no doubt their consciences would teach them, as clearly as their Bibles, that

it is their own wickedness, not that of others, which makes them so very keen and acute in putting evil interpretations upon doubtful conduct.

I proceed now to another mark—the last I shall now mention—by which we may try ourselves whether the grace of God, which we are daily receiving, is thrown away upon us or no. Are we daily becoming more industrious, and readier to deny ourselves, for the help and comfort of our neighbour? The more we know of the Gospel, the more we know of God's love to us; how dear it cost HIM, how far it reaches, how unceasing and unwearyed it is: the more pressing, therefore, is the call upon us, to think nothing too good for our brethren, no sacrifice too costly to be offered for the sake of ensuring their eternal welfare. Every time we draw near to the Holy Communion, we see by faith the Cross of CHRIST, His Body broken, and His Blood poured out to redeem us from eternal death. How then can we avoid reflecting, with the beloved disciple, St. John, "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because HE laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." "To lay down our lives," says the Apostle; for he lived in constant danger of that extreme trial of his virtue: he knew not how soon he might be called to martyrdom, to confirm the faith of his fellow-Christians. We, by God's mercy, are not likely to have to struggle with such overwhelming temptations, but it is not the less our duty to spend our lives in our brethren's service. In whatever way we are engaged with them, we ought to think much, and patiently, how we may do them most good. I am afraid most of us may find, when our time comes, that we have a more fearful account than we expected to give of our neglect of opportunities of this kind. Commonly we think no more of those with whom we are concerned in the ordinary transactions of life, than how we may deal kindly and honestly by them: but if we had St. Paul's mind, to spend and be spent for them, or the mind of our Blessed SAVIOUR, who went about doing good, we should consider their case more deeply than this; we should contrive beforehand how we might order all our intercourse with them, so as to give them most encouragement in the way of duty, or to check them most effectually in sin. I do not say that we should *tell* them, or any one else, that we are doing thus; but surely we ought to do so:

wherever we are, and whoever is with us, we ought to keep God's watch for the good of our neighbour's soul ; and the more regularly and the more quietly we perform this duty, the more reason we have to hope that we are not receiving the grace of God in vain.

This, I say, is a plain duty, and so are all the other tempers and habits which I have now set down as marks of Christian improvement ; the right ordering of our thoughts and words, especially what we say and think of our neighbour's conduct. And yet these are points, in which hourly experience shows that it is very possible and very easy to fall short, in the midst of great attention to religious ordinances, and a sincere desire, so far as that goes, of pleasing God.

But none of these marks of real improvement are hard to understand, or hard to try one's self by. Consider then, I beseech you, whether it is not exceeding sinful and dangerous to rest contented in careless doubt about these things, and take for granted that you are going on as well as other men, while it is in your power, by constant watching yourself, to make your eternal salvation sure.

Baptized into the Holy Catholic Church, we cannot deny that we have received the grace of God. " Greater is HE that is in us, than he that is in the world : " and whatever temptations we may be thrown amongst, if we die without sincere and timely repentance and amendment, we shall find ourselves answerable for having received His Grace in vain.

SERMON XCIV.

OF ABOUNDING MORE AND MORE.

1 THESS. iv. 1.

“We beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the LORD JESUS, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk, and to please GOD, so ye would abound more and more.”

IF any one wishes to see, what it is to begin well in Christian faith and practice, and, at the same time, what care should be taken not to depend too much upon mere beginnings, however praiseworthy, he cannot do better than examine carefully these two Epistles of St. Paul to the Christians of Thessalonica.

The Apostle seems hardly to know how to say enough of their faith and charity, or of the noble and self-denying way in which they had received the Gospel. They had received it, he says, in much affliction, (being persecuted by Jews, and Gentiles too, the moment they were seen to favour it,) yet with joy of the HOLY GHOST; joy, that is, poured into their hearts by the HOLY SPIRIT of God, and thus they became ensamples and patterns to all the Christians of those countries; and having so received it, they continued in it, not failing at all either in their faith towards God, or in their affection to St. Paul himself. This was such a delight to him, as can only be expressed in his own affectionate words. “Brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith: for now we live, if ye stand fast in the LORD. For what thanks can we render to God again

for you, for all the joy, wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God; night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face?"

There could not well be more promising converts; and yet the very next words show how anxious he was that they might not trust in their first promising conversion, "Praying exceedingly, that we might see your face:" to what purpose? not for his own pleasure, but "to perfect that which was lacking in their faith." The same feeling runs through the whole of the letter; his joy in what they *had* done, is everywhere tempered by a real and serious anxiety, lest they should stop short, and begin to think they had done enough. Both are shown together, in the verse which begins the Epistle for this day: "We beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the LORD JESUS, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk, and to please God, so ye would abound more and more." "As ye have received of us how ye ought to walk;"—that is an acknowledgment of their having begun well: "we beseech and exhort you by the LORD JESUS, that ye would abound more and more;"—that is a call, as serious as the heart of man could imagine, not to stand still, not to suppose they had done enough. And with reason is the verse chosen by the Church for one of her Epistles proper for Lent; since one indispensable mark of true repentance is a daily, unwearied endeavour to improve. This I shall first endeavour to show, and then add some remarks on the sinfulness of neglecting such endeavours, the danger we are in of doing so, and the most effectual way of guarding both ourselves and others against that danger.

Now, with regard to the absolute necessity of continual improvement, it appears, in the first place, from this circumstance, that if we rightly value the first good beginning, we must, from the very nature of the case, go on from one degree of holiness to another. Men may very well do something which looks like repentance upon poor imperfect worldly reasons, and may deceive themselves and others into a notion that they are true Christian penitents; as, for example, intemperance may be left off for health or character's sake, or a quarrel may be made up with a view to our worldly interest, or the fear of approaching death may drive men against their will to long-neglected ordi-

nances of religion ; and it is no wonder if such a repentance as this very soon begin to stand still : if, having reached such and such a point, the man imagine himself good enough, and take no more pains to be better : but this is quite contrary to the nature of true repentance upon Christian principles.

By Christian principles, I mean first a deep sense of the continual presence of Almighty God, and of the care HE takes for the welfare of our souls. Consider this peculiar presence deliberately and seriously, and let it prevail with you to change your ways in earnest, and begin to turn from the sin, whatever it be, to which you feel yourself most inclined. When you have done so, you will still perceive in your heart exactly the same reason, why you should go on and repent yet more perfectly, and serve and obey your all-seeing God, yet more affectionately and sincerely : and so on from day to day, through every degree of repentance and obedience, remember only in earnest that God is watching you, and you can never, surely, be quite satisfied with yourself ; you can never think you have thought, said, and done, virtuously enough, to be fit and worthy to stand in His sight.

This, I say, would be the natural consequence of considering God's presence in a Christian manner. I say, " in a Christian manner," because, if we considered it apart from what the Gospel teaches, it might naturally (though not reasonably) lead many of us to despair, instead of endeavouring to improve. Men might say to themselves, " When we have done our best, there is no standing before this Just and Holy God ; therefore we may as well give it up, and enjoy ourselves while we can." Such was the impiety of many, before the Gospel was made known : let us hope that there are none among us, who are even now guilty of the like blasphemous thoughts ; for indeed they are most blasphemous and inexcusable in every one who knows what CHRIST has done and suffered for us, and what grace and assistance His HOLY SPIRIT is always waiting to bestow upon us. We are sure now, how feeble soever we may find ourselves, that whatever we do sincerely, in the way of goodness, is sure to tell ; we dare not therefore despond, and we have no excuse whatever, if we do not carry on our first good beginnings, and repent better and better every day of our lives.

This is yet more absolutely necessary, because, if men do not

improve, they are, in practice, sure to go back. They cannot stay where they are; they must either grow worse or better. For it is the nature of all strong impressions to act vehemently on the mind at first, and after a little time to fade away as it were, and gradually become weaker and weaker. Thus the fear of God, and the dread of sin and punishment, in which repentance usually begins, if we do not, resolutely and on purpose, endeavour to keep them up, are sure to lose their force on our minds. We must pray to God, day after day, that we may fear HIM more and more; or else, as the world continues close to us, and we cannot avoid being tempted, we are sure, in fact, day after day, to fear HIM less and less. We must without any delay set about *doing* right, and not trust in any degree to mere right *feeling*, however earnest and sincere. The feeling of its own accord will grow weaker and pass away; but we shall be no losers by that, if we take care to strengthen ourselves in the habit of doing what is right and religious. St. Paul, no doubt, was more overpowered at first with remorse for his sins, and the terror of God's presence, immediately after his conversion, than he was in after years, when the truths of the Gospel had become familiar to him. But he was improving, nevertheless, all the time; because, what he lost in intense and passionate feeling, he more than made up by his fixed, habitual piety. But if he had allowed the one to abate, without serious and constant endeavours to cherish and advance the other; if, when he waked from his trance of fear and astonishment on his conversion, he had taken no particular pains to become a better Christian, who does not see that even *his* good impressions would by degrees have died away, and he would, naturally and of course, have lost the benefit of God's gracious invitation to repentance?

Just so will it turn out with any one of ourselves, who may be so presumptuous as to imagine, that he can by any means stand still in his course of piety and virtue. Suppose, for instance, a man possessed with an evil spirit of covetousness, or pride, or malice, or any bad desire, in which he may have gone on for many years; and suppose some illness or misfortune to take place, which causes him, for a while, to have serious fears of his own everlasting condition. As long as those fears last, he will seem to himself and others, perhaps he will really be, a better

man than he was. But the illness goes off; the misfortune is remedied; and the emotion of fear and remorse is blunted by time, or overpowered by newer and probably more enticing passions. Is not this man in the greatest possible jeopardy? Must he not watch and pray, form deliberate resolutions, and deny himself dangerous liberties? In short, must he not spend his whole life in steadily and considerably trying to become less and less proud, less and less covetous, less and less dissolute? and if he neglect to do so, will he not of course, and without any effort, fall back into a worse condition than he was in before his partial recovery? An Apostle has taught us what to think of this. "If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the LORD and SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they had known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them."

Consider what has been said, and you must perceive that the only reasonable and the only safe way is, having once begun the work of religion, to be always labouring to "abound more and more."

And, over and above this, we are to recollect what our Blessed SAVIOUR has clearly intimated, that there are degrees of glory in the world to come; and those who have made the best use of their time and talents shall receive the highest reward. No man can ever know for certain that he himself has done enough, considering his privileges and opportunities of various kinds, to make his salvation sure if he were to die this moment. But if he could be certain of this, still reason, and conscience, and wisdom, and gratitude, would urge him to lose no time, but press forward and forward to obtain as much as ever he could of the inestimable joys of Eternity. Too many of us, up to this time, have been sadly perverting the Mercy of God, in leaving it unknown to us how far HE is pleased with us at any time. He meant that the uncertainty of our spiritual condition should urge us on to continual improvement; that we should never dream we had done enough. We take it as if we might indulge ourselves more freely in doubtful things; as if we had done quite enough for ourselves,

when we are not quite *sure* that we are in a bad way. Let us be persuaded henceforth to try and have better minds.

It may help us, in judging more truly of our duty in this respect, if we put ourselves, as nearly as we can, in the place of these Thessalonians, who had learned Christianity from the lips of St. Paul himself. For, indeed, we are very nearly in their place; we, like them, have received of the Apostles how we ought to walk and to please God. The only difference is, that they received this knowledge by word of mouth, we by reading the Apostolic letters and listening to the Apostolic Church. Now what sort of a spirit and temper should we have judged these Thessalonians to be of, if we found that as soon as their teacher was gone away to Athens, they had become careless about his instructions, thought much of what they had done already, and took no pains whatever to improve? Whatever censure we pass on them we must acknowledge surely to be due to ourselves, in such measure as we neglect the duty of amending daily, because our TEACHER is out of sight.

Yet this is what we are sure to do, if we be not constantly exhorted and reminded of it; nay, there is great reason to fear that all exhortation may prove in vain. For, first of all, having been bred up from our cradle in the *knowledge* and *understanding* of our Christian duty, we are apt to fancy ourselves familiar with the *practice* of it too. We are convinced in our minds that we *know* it well enough; and this of itself inclines us to be too soon satisfied with our accustomed way of doing it. Let us recollect ourselves a little. Have we not, up to this day, very many of us, been saying good words over and over so often, and so inattentively, that it might seem as if we imagined good thoughts and good actions would come after them of course, without any particular effort or trouble on our part? We grow tired of watching, of prayer, of self-denial, simply because it is the same thing over and over again: and so it must of course be, as long as the temptations are the same which we have to resist. But they will not be the same; they will be stronger and stronger, if we give way to this feeling of weariness. And, on the other hand, if we patiently strive against it; if we *force* ourselves to attend to great and eternal truths, however often we have attended to them before, our task will not perhaps seem easier to ourselves, but our

reward will be surer in heaven, and we shall stand higher in the favour of God. We shall, though we may not feel it, gradually become holier and better men, by the mere effort and anxious endeavour not to become in any degree worse.

Again; a sincere Christian will be on his guard, that he make no dangerous comparisons between himself and his neighbours. It will never do to take it for granted that we keep our place in respect of piety and goodness,—that we are no worse than we were, in fact;—because we are no worse in comparison with them. It may be that all around you are gone astray from God, and in the way to everlasting ruin: if such turn out to be the case, you may excuse and flatter yourself now that you are no worse than they; but it will be little comfort to you in the day of account, when you find that your condemnation is as bad as theirs. Obvious however as these reflections are, very few Christians indeed have courage to bear them practically in mind. We look to see what our neighbours are doing, instead of applying ourselves, with all our might, to the performance of God's will as soon as we know it; and thus throw away, one after another, our best chances of improvement and perfection. Each time that we give way to bad example, our transgression seems more natural and easy to us, till at length it comes as a matter of course, and we hardly reckon ourselves the worse for it. There is no such enemy to real amendment, as a too anxious regard either to the opinions or example of others.

These are some of the many temptations which beset us at every moment of our lives, and are the cause why too many Christians, instead of seeking to abound more and more, go backwards in goodness as they draw nearer their latter end; temptations, great, and near, and powerful; it is impossible, do what we will, to remove ourselves quite out of their reach. They must be met and overcome, for they cannot be avoided.

And how are we to meet them? By true principles and steady purposes; by a deep mistrust of ourselves, and as deep a confidence in that Almighty SPIRIT, who is always at hand to help us. The Apostle, in three words of the text, has pointed out to us what we should do. "We beseech you, brethren," says he, "and exhort you, by the LORD JESUS." That Name once mentioned, enough is said to awaken, in any considerate Chris-

tian, a fixed resolution to improve daily, and a comfortable hope of grace to do so.

For we are not to suppose that St. Paul introduced the sacred Name of our SAVIOUR merely to strengthen his own expression, and make the Thessalonians more attentive. There is more in it, a great deal, than this comes to. It was as if he had said, "Do you believe in good earnest that the SON of GOD died on the cross, to save you from your sins? then remember that you must be conformed to His death, or HE will have died in vain for you; that the LORD JESUS CHRIST, our SAVIOUR and REDEEMER, is now and ever present with you, by His divine power and Godhead; that HE seeks your salvation now as anxiously as when HE prayed for you hanging on the Cross; that HE feels all your wants and infirmities, knows exactly where your weak places are, and is prepared to strengthen and assist you the moment you seriously ask HIM? Can you believe this, and lie slothfully down, not caring whether you please or offend HIM; whether you are growing better or worse?"

Again, when St. Paul calls on us to abound more and more, by the Name of JESUS CHRIST, it was as if he had said, "Do you believe what the Gospel tells you of our Blessed MASTER's pure and perfect example? that HE spent His nights in prayer and His days in charity? that HE 'went about doing good?' that His worst enemies could find no fault in HIM? that HE laid down His life for His betrayers and murderers, and died praying to His FATHER for them? Do you indeed believe this? Then how can you be contented to live as you are living? to die as you are likely to die? so very imperfect in your faith, your purity, and charity; so very unlike your Holy and Divine REDEEMER. How can you be at rest a single moment, without trying at least to come a little nearer His example, before your time of trial is over?"

Again, the Name of our LORD is here used to put us in mind to Whom we are accountable; as if it were said, "In the Name of HIM Who will come to be your Judge, I charge you to be careful of every moment of your time, every talent of your mind and body. I charge you, make the most of them all; for you know not how soon you may be called to answer for all, in a world where it will be too late to think of improving."

Lastly, the Name of CHRIST is used to remind all who have ears to hear, of His awful warnings concerning those who are too soon contented with their own imperfect repentance. "When the unclean Spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest." The evil one being driven out of our souls and bodies, either by Baptism or by true and sufficient Repentance, will not rest until he have obtained a lodging in one miserable person or another : and if he possibly can, he will return to the same again. Beware of him : for if he find the house empty, he will not return alone, but with "seven other spirits more wicked than himself." They will "enter in and dwell there : there will be little or no chance of their being ever any more cast out : " "and the last state of that man will be worse than the first ;" by how much he has abused greater grace, and become more like a fallen angel.

"I beseech you therefore, Brethren, and exhort you by the LORD JESUS ;" by His cross and passion ; by His continual fatherly presence ; by His gracious and perfect example ; by His severe threatenings against the unprofitable ; and by His coming again to be our Judge :—I beseech you, "that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more."

SERMON XCV.

THE RELAPSED SINNER.

ST. MATT. xii. 45.

“ The last state of that man is worse than the first.”

THESE fearful words are our SAVIOUR’S conclusion of a parable, which HE had just been addressing to the unbelieving Jews. They had said, in their spite and malice, that the very miracles our LORD was performing in their sight, were not His own, but the work of an evil spirit. “ He casteth out devils,” they said, “ by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils.”

Our SAVIOUR, having first shown them how senseless, as well as how impious this was, went on to warn them of their own extreme danger, in a parable taken from the circumstances of the case. It is likely, that if we had lived in that time and country, and had seen with our eyes persons whom we know to be possessed, as many were then, with evil spirits, we should be so much the better able to understand the particulars of this parable. Thus much, however, we do understand, that God’s Providence, for wise purposes, permitted the devil to torment men, their minds and bodies, with a kind of madness; which being known to be the evil spirit’s work, gave occasion to many wonderful proofs of our LORD’S divine power and authority, not only over ordinary diseases, but also over the powers of darkness. And it should seem from this parable of our LORD’S, that

when a person had been once possessed in this way, and cured, he was yet liable to a return of the mischief, unless he were very careful of himself. So indeed one might suppose, from the restless and malicious temper of the devil and his angels; and so, we are told, it was with them.

Suppose one of them gone out of a man, and wandering, as it were, through dry and desolate places; he would still go on, longing and wishing to be somewhere, where he might practise his power of mischief,—to find some one whom he might torment as before. Suppose it occurred to such an evil spirit, to return unto his house from whence he came out: *i. e.* to go back, and try, if he could, to possess and torment the same person again. Our SAVIOUR intimates, that if he found the house empty, swept and garnished; *i. e.* if he found the mind and body of the unhappy patient in a fit state of preparation for him, the relapse would be seven times worse than the original illness; he would take to him “seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they would enter in and dwell there, and the last state of that man would be worse than the first.” A frightful picture indeed! and one of which the full horror would be understood by those who heard HIM speak, much better than we can understand it, because they had seen such cases; indeed they had just that hour been present, while HE cured a very malignant one; and they knew, most likely, among other things, how apt the evil spirit was to return, and how dreadful and hopeless the affliction then became. So much the more must they have been alarmed, as many as had any serious thought, when they heard HIM, in conclusion, apply this dreadful parable to themselves; “So shall it be also to this evil generation;” *i. e.* “you Jews, who have rejected My Gospel, will find before long that it is with you, as if an evil spirit had been cast out, and had returned with seven worse spirits, and gotten entire hold of a man. Your last state will be worse than your first.

To understand this, we may consider what was the state and temper of the Jewish people, at the time of our LORD’s appearance among them. Having gone on for some hundred years without any kind of idolatry, they reckoned themselves especial favourites of Almighty GOD; considered themselves chosen, above all the nations of the earth, to be His people, in such a

sense, that they need not fear His ever rejecting them. On this, as on other occasions, our SAVIOUR took pains to correct this great and deadly mistake of theirs. It is as if HE had said to them, "Your nation was once of old, like this man before he was cured, in the power of an evil and unclean spirit. You were, as your own Scriptures tell you, wholly given to the worst idolatry, and to those deadly sins, which idolatry brings with it. For this, you were carried away captive to Babylon, and other miseries came upon you, which, by God's grace, succeeded at last in driving out the unclean spirit; you have now lived in your own land more than four hundred years, free from what, in former days, was your great sin, the worshipping of idols. But do not therefore lift yourselves up, nor imagine yourselves safe in God's favour. The evil spirit, once cast out, may return, may find a place prepared for him, may enter in and dwell there; and your last state may be worse than your first. Nay, it is sure to be thus with you, if you go on as you have now begun. For although you have not worshipped false gods, you have not set up images to kneel to, yet you have rejected the true God by rejecting His SON, and ascribing His miracles to the devil. Beware how you go on to reject His HOLY SPIRIT too. Your last chance will be then gone; HE will give you over to a reprobate mind; the evil spirits will work their own way with you, and bring you to destruction both of body and soul."

Such, in substance, was our LORD's warning to the scorers and unbelievers of His time. And in a few years they found it as true, as all unbelievers, before long, will find the terrors they now scoff at. Having crucified CHRIST and blasphemed the HOLY GHOST, as if many devils had entered into them, they plunged into such sins, and underwent such a grievous punishment, as have made the very name of Jew (according to the prophecy) "an astonishment, and a proverb, and a by-word to all nations under Heaven."

But our LORD did not utter the warning for those impenitent Jews alone. It holds just as good of all who have been, in any sense, by His Mercy, delivered from their old sins, from those perverse and evil habits which possessed them like unclean spirits. It is true of every one of them, that as long as they are

in this world, they are in danger, more or less, of relapsing into their bad ways, and that if they do so relapse, their last state will be worse than their first.

As Christians, baptized into CHRIST's Church, taught to pray to the FATHER in His Name, favoured with the promise of His HOLY SPIRIT, we all are like persons delivered from an evil spirit, *i. e.* we are put in such a condition, we have such help placed within our reach, that we may shake off the chains of darkness, we may love and serve our REDEEMER, if we will. But our enemy is not finally put down, nor are we quite beyond his reach. There is not a Christian soul in the world, but has great reason to fear continually, lest the devil return and undo that good work which was begun at Baptism, and which the Church is daily labouring to complete, by instruction, warning, prayers, and sacraments. He is always restless and uneasy, like a person turned out of his home, and wandering in dry and desert regions, till he can lay hold again of those souls, which the Grace of God and the care of the Church, bringing them to early baptism, has taken away from him and put in the arms of our SAVIOUR. For this purpose he loses no time, but, from the very moment they are able to think, carefully throws temptations in their way; persuades them that prayer, the service of God, obedience to parents, and respect for their betters, are dull, unpleasant, wearisome things, for which there will be time enough by and by; for the present, they need only care to enjoy themselves.

These lessons of the evil spirit we are but too willing to practise; they fall in with our corrupt nature, and suit us so perfectly well, that it is surprising how thoroughly we contrive to learn them often before we are out of our childhood: and as long as men refuse the means of grace, every hour of their trial on earth, which was meant to prepare them for eternal life, will only make them more and more the children of hell and of lost spirits.

Thus it happens, that Christian countries are full of persons of all ages and stations, leading the lives and practising the tempers of heathens: persons of whom we may reasonably say, that it had been better for them had they never been baptized, better had they never seen a church, nor ever heard the names of God and of CHRIST. Their present state (let us hope, by God's Grace, that

it may not prove their last state,) is surely much worse than their first : as much so, as impenitent wicked Christians are worse than mere ignorant heathens.

There is however among Christians one kind of wickedness, more particularly answering to our SAVIOUR'S description in the text ; the wickedness of those who relapse into any sin, after they appear to be cured of it, when, by the Grace of God's good SPIRIT, the habit of ill-doing appears to be broken, and they seem to be able to keep themselves in order. Concerning such as these, I suppose, the Apostle St. Peter gives us warning : " If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world by the knowledge of the LORD and SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they had known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it has happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."

It seems that the Apostle is speaking, more especially, of such sins as the word " pollution " would lead us to think of ; such sins as are not fit to be named, much less practised, among Christians. Into these " sinful lusts of the flesh," he seems to say, a relapse after penitence is especially to be dreaded ; and sad experience shows us the reason. It very rarely indeed happens, that persons who have once, by God's special Grace, been recovered from sins of that kind, if they again fall into the same evil habit, finish by an effectual repentance at last. Their hearts become cold, and hard, and dead ; after one or two relapses, they scarcely think it worth while to repent, knowing as they do by fatal experience, how likely they are to sin again ; and thus, in mind and desire at least, they do not leave off sinning till they die.

Consider again the case of the drunkard. Suppose a man, touched with remorse, beholding the misery his wicked selfishness causes to those who are nearest, and ought to be dearest to him ; and, moved to remorse by the good SPIRIT of GOD, suppose such a man to leave off his dangerous habit ; suppose him to resist so many temptations as to be now reckoned a sober man.

If he is not a religious man too ; if he has not used himself every day to beg pardon at the foot of the Cross, and to implore the Grace of the HOLY SPIRIT ; it is but too likely that in some unguarded hour the old temptation will prevail against him : he will be again entangled therein, and overcome ; and having once given way, the devil will find no great difficulty in persuading him that he may as well give way twice, then three times, and so on, as often as may happen to be pleasant or convenient. Whenever his conscience begins to smite him, whenever God's Providence sends a warning, or calls him by the motions of His good SPIRIT, the chilling thought will arise at the same time, " I have tried all this before, and it ended in nothing ; it will be but trouble lost. I may just as well enjoy myself as other people do, and think no more of it." Thus the wretched drunkard goes on, plunging into sin deeper and deeper, till his conscience is seared with a hot iron, and he quite loses all wish to repent.

By these two examples of sensuality and intemperance (and it is much the same in all other sins), you see that a man's condition is *naturally* worse after relapsing than before repentance : to which the Scripture teaches us to add, that he is in a spiritual sense far worse off, because he has done so much more towards grieving God's HOLY SPIRIT. It is somewhat in the same way, as when any person in worldly matters falls into error and imprudence, after having been repeatedly checked in it by the warnings of a kind and good friend. The friend, vexed and offended, departs, and checks and warns him no more. So when people wilfully relapse, after they had found by their own experience that the Heavenly COMFORTER was willing to help them,—that they might be good if they would use the means of grace ;—this is just provoking HIM to do as HE did to the Jews in His anger ; to give them up to their own hearts' lusts, and let them follow their own imaginations. And if they have not God's HOLY SPIRIT to help them, how can they go right for a single moment ?

What then is to be done, seeing relapses are so very dangerous, and human nature so very weak ? Some, perhaps, may try to flatter themselves, that they may as well continue in their first sin, and spare themselves the trouble of all kinds of repentance. That is, having a sickness on them, which is sure to be mortal, left to itself, they will not take the only medicine which can cure

them, lest they should fail to take it properly, and relapse and die after all. I trust there are some at least here, who are more grateful to their SAVIOUR, and more careful of their souls, than to deal so madly, so unkindly, with them. They will consider, what our LORD has pointed out as the true reason of these sad and frequent relapses. The evil spirit in the parable, returning to his house whence he came out, found it empty, swept, and garnished; and therefore it was no hard matter for him to enter in and dwell there, and seven worse spirits with him. So when any man's darling, bosom sin had appeared to be cast out by the grace of GOD, it is but too common for that man to be found, when next the same temptation returns, with a mind empty, swept, and garnished to entertain it. That is, though men leave off their transgression for a while, they do not in earnest turn their hearts towards other and better things; they do not fill up the void in their desires, with thoughts of HIM, who is their only hope, CHRIST crucified for their sins; they do not humbly and constantly seek that Grace and Strength from above, without which they can do nothing against GOD's enemies and their own. They imagine they have done great things in turning for awhile from some one evil habit; quite forgetting that GOD would have them not only obey HIM but love HIM; would have them love HIM in CHRIST JESUS, with all their heart, and all their soul, and all their mind, and all their strength. That is the only preparation of heart which will enable you to resist your spiritual enemy, when having been once repulsed, he returns to the charge, in the hope of taking you unawares. An earnest wish to please HIM who laid down His life for you, cherished and maintained by fervent prayer for the help of His Almighty SPIRIT, and by humble communion with HIM in all the ways which HE has ordained; this will keep you armed at all points. But without this true Christian piety, your partial amendments for the world's sake will not secure you from grievous relapses; will not free you from the sentence of those, who shall be found at the last day to have received the grace of GOD in vain.

SERMON XCVI.

PRACTICAL FAITH, THE CONDITION OF LIFE.

ST. JOHN iii. 36.

“ He that believeth on the SON hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the SON shall not see life, but the wrath of GOD abideth on him.”

THIS one verse contains in a short space, the whole Gospel of JESUS CHRIST: His mercies and His terrors alike.

I say, His terrors as well as His mercies, because of those who think of the Gospel as if it were all made up of mercy, and of GOD, as if HE were all love—all love and mercy in such a sense as to do away with His anger against sin, and with a reasonable fear of eternal damnation. It is true, HE is all love, but yet so as to leave room for the execution of His threatenings against the impenitent. His Gospel is all mercy, but yet there is such a place as Hell-fire prepared for those who obstinately reject it. Nay, this very thing, that Hell-fire is there distinctly revealed, makes a part of GOD's mercy by the Gospel. It is distinctly revealed, that those who are in danger of it, may hear and fear, and earnestly avoid it. Is not this one of the greatest of mercies? an unspeakable instance of the tenderest and most fatherly care?

We may wish to hide our eyes from it, but the New Testament will not let us forget that GOD is greatly to be feared, as well as dearly to be loved. Our LORD and His Apostles speak throughout the same language as His great Forerunner in the text: “ He

that believeth on the SON hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the SON shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

First comes the message of mercy : and happy they who will listen to it, and obey it, without needing the warning that follows. "He that believeth on the SON hath everlasting life." He hath it, says the Baptist, already : it is not affirmed that he will have it hereafter. By God's gracious promise and covenant he has it, as surely as any one who has the deeds of a house or an estate may be said to have the house or estate itself. Thus every good Christian is already entered on everlasting life. He sees it before him at the end of his journey ; God means it for him, and he cannot miss of it, provided he continue in the same humble practical way in which, by God's grace, he has set out. He knows, indeed, that he must die, and lie down in the grave for a while : but the sting of his death is taken out by the comfortable remembrance of His SAVIOUR'S Cross. He must die : but, according to the promise of his LORD, he "shall never taste of death."

Such is, in part, everlasting life ; but who are they for whom it is prepared ? The text tells us plainly. There is but one sort of person whom God will judge worthy of so great a blessing. It is "he that believeth on the SON." Not simply "who believeth HIM:" for the devils also, and lost spirits of the impenitent, believe what our SAVIOUR taught. They believe and tremble ; they cannot choose but do so. But it is a faith which does them no good, and, of course, must be very different from that faith, which, according to the Covenant of the Gospel, entitles the repenting sinner to life everlasting. That is expressed in the text and in other places, not by merely *believing*, but by *believing on* our REDEEMER : that is, putting our whole trust in HIM ; surrendering ourselves, our souls and bodies, to His holy care and keeping ; giving ourselves up to HIM to do what HE will with us, and looking for no comfort or happiness any way but through HIM. This is *believing on* the SON ; it is much more than merely believing what HE says : although, of course, whoever believes on HIM will, of course, take all His words for truth, knowing them to be the words of God, who cannot lie.

You may understand the difference plainly enough by con-

sidering some cases in ordinary life. A man comes to me and relates some circumstance which happened at a distance: I have no doubt, for such and such reasons, that what he tells me of the matter is true; that is to say, I believe that man, and the account he brings me: but it does not therefore follow, that I trust myself with him; that I depend, or, in the Scripture sense, *believe on* him. But if the matter of which he brings me word concern my own good very nearly; for example, suppose him one skilled in the law, bringing me an account of some property which I may somehow recover, and if I show my opinion of him by not only believing the facts he relates to me, but also putting myself in his hands for the conduct of the whole business, relying upon him, and really endeavouring to take every step he advises me, and giving up my own will and opinion to his: then, indeed, I may be said to believe *on* such a lawyer, to trust myself with him, to have faith in him. This kind of simple parable, the like to which any one who chooses may readily contrive for himself, will show what the Bible means, when it makes such a difference between merely *believing* CHRIST and *believing on* HIM.

The same thing is shown, still more plainly, by that which may be called the favourite Scripture example of a true, lively, justifying faith; the example of Abraham, the father and pattern of the faithful. Abraham did not only believe, that what God promised to do for his posterity was true, but he showed his belief by acting accordingly. He trusted himself altogether with God, following His call to a distance from his native land, not knowing whither he went; sojourning, contented, in a strange country, in which no land of his own was given him, no, not so much as to set his foot upon; and, finally, offering up his only begotten Son, through whom all the promises on which he depended had been expressly made to him. Is it not manifest that Abraham's faith, the faith which was counted unto him for righteousness, lay not in merely believing God's Word, but in behaving as if that Word were true, and in trusting himself with his MAKER accordingly? But such as his faith was, such too must ours be, if we would have our sins forgiven. They that are of such faith, they only, if we will believe St. Paul, may hope to be "blessed with faithful Abraham."

If you had rather have examples from the New Testament,

the Book of Acts of the holy Apostles is full of the noble deeds of those persons, who, in the beginning of the Gospel of CHRIST, became Christians and were justified by faith. It would not do at that time for men to believe the Apostles' preaching, and confess the faith of CHRIST crucified, and yet go on as before. By the very act of confessing they really renounced the world, to which, until then, they had been used; they gave up many things which they naturally loved; they exposed themselves to hatred, derision, desolation, and sometimes to a cruel death. This was believing on the LORD JESUS, as that jailor at Philippi did, who was converted in the night by the miraculous earthquake, and fell so eagerly before St. Paul, saying, "What must I do to be saved?" St. Paul answered, much as St. John in the text, "Believe on the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and thou shalt be saved;" not meaning a bare naked belief, but such a belief as would take him from among heathens, and cause him to be baptized, and reckoned among Christians; that is, in other words, it would expose him to be treated as he had just seen done to St. Paul; to be beaten in their synagogues, and scourged from city to city. This, you see at once, was any thing but a bare naked faith, a mere feeling of confidence in the mind: it was as *practical* as any thing could possibly be; as much so as Abraham's own conduct, when he, as an Apostle tells us, was "justified by works, having offered Isaac his son on the altar." And the other instances of saving faith in the Acts are just like this: faith, in those days, being put to trial immediately, and it being hardly possible for an hypocritical professor of Christianity to continue many days a professor at all.

Faith, then, to be like the faith of Abraham, or like the faith of those early Christians, requires sincere, general resignation of heart, not in this or that thing, but in the whole course and conduct of our life.

But if it be so, some will ask, (with the disciples of our LORD on an occasion not very unlike this,) Who then can be saved? who can flatter himself that *his* resignation is so complete and perfect as this?

It is too true, there is no such thing as perfection in Faith, or any thing else in this world. Even of Abraham, our pattern, we are expressly told that his faith wavered; he had misgivings at times. But the consolation of Christian Faith is this, that it

shows us ONE on whom we may depend for a thorough pardon of such infirmities, provided we sincerely and regularly try to amend them. It shows us the Cross of our Most HOLY SAVIOUR, for whose sake GOD is well pleased even with such an imperfect service as penitent sinners are able to offer. HE will not be extreme to mark what is done amiss; HE will deal with them who really make it the chief business of their lives to please HIM;—who in earnest endeavour to believe, and repent, and obey, seeking always His grace to enable them to do so:—with these our gracious FATHER will deal as if they had really deserved well of HIM. Though it be quite impossible for creatures to deserve any thing of their CREATOR, or for sinners to make their JUDGE their debtor, yet to the sincerely believing and penitent, our LORD will say at the last day, “Well done, good and faithful servant;” and HE promises to such in the Book of Revelation, “They shall walk with ME in white, for they are worthy.”

Does any one imagine that it is at all disrespectful to the Sovereign Grace and free Mercy of the Ever-blessed SON and SPIRIT of God, when we speak of HIM as opening Heaven to the believing and penitent only? Does it seem to any one as so much taken from God’s glory, when true Faith and Christian Obedience are called Conditions of His Holy Covenant? Those who are inclined to speak thus, or to hearken to others so speaking, would do well to consider what they can make of the express words of Holy Scripture, representing the Last Day every where as a day of rendering up men’s accounts; a time when the MASTER will come and see if His servants have done their work; a final examination of the branches of the Vine, whether they bear fruit or no. In short, our LORD’s preaching from beginning to end is summed up in His own brief warning: “Not every one that saith unto ME, LORD, LORD, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of My FATHER which is in Heaven.”

Let us then seriously ask ourselves, Can it be safe, or wise, or Christian, to think of our own salvation as of a matter in which we have nothing at all to do, our LORD having done all for us already? It *cannot* be right, for one short and plain reason: that it is quite contrary to Holy Scripture. GOD, who surely knows best which way of teaching is most for His own glory, speaks to us Christians, every where, as if it now depended upon ourselves

whether we shall be saved or lost. Surely it must be a mistake, whenever any, out of a vain notion of glorifying HIM, say or think little of Christian practice, and of what is to be done on our part.

Our SAVIOUR Himself has taught us to consider the case between God and a believing penitent as being like the case of a creditor forgiving a debtor. Now consider a moment. Is a man said to forgive his debtor less freely, because he makes that kindness depend on certain conditions? Suppose a drunkard, or a profane swearer, in debt to one who really wishes him well; and suppose the creditor should say to him, "Now I will tell you what I will do: I will forgive you all that debt, if you will come to me three years hence, and prove to me by undoubted testimony that you are thoroughly cured of this bad habit of yours." Will any one pretend to say, that such kindness on the part of the creditor would be less free, or less complete, than if he had forgiven all the debt at once, leaving the person to go on as profanely and sottishly as he pleased? Now, this is a sort of likeness of God's way of dealing with Christians, as made known by the Holy Gospel; only the debt there forgiven is far more than we can conceive, and the consideration upon which God forgives it, is the Blood of His own Eternal SON, made Man, and dying for us. A thought, beyond all other things, proper to make us perceive His infinite love, and endeavour, as we can, to love HIM in return, and give HIM all possible glory. But surely men do not love their SAVIOUR the less, nor take any thing from His glory, because they are very much afraid of forfeiting the rich treasure of His love, and very desirous of doing their best, that when HE comes, HE may in His mercy count them not unworthy of remaining with HIM for ever.

The glory, then, of our Divine REDEEMER is not in any degree lessened, by our putting men in mind of what God expects of them, as their part of the Holy Covenant. On the other hand, since it is clear that no man is so good as he ought to be, and yet we encourage those who always try to be quite sincere in their faith and practice, to hope for pardon and happiness at last: here is clearly a kind of temptation, an occasion which the hypocrite in heart may take hold of, for continuing wilfully imperfect in his faith and repentance. He may say—many thousands have

said—"No doubt there is a certain quantity of imperfection, which will not shut Heaven against a man. Why should I not believe that this or that indulgence, to which I feel myself strongly inclined, may in my case be considered a part of that pardonable imperfection? Why may I not take such and such liberties, though God's word be expressly against them, and yet be reckoned on the whole, and at last, faithful?" Many, I say, no doubt, do daily deceive themselves in this manner: they do, knowingly and presumptuously, venture as near the edge of sin as they dare; for why? they say, "Every man has his fault, and God expects penitence, not perfection."

Now, such people must be told plainly, that what God expects is *sincerity*, and their conduct shows them *insincere*; and therefore, if indulged and continued in, it will shortly bring them to eternal death. For if they really loved their SAVIOUR, and desired to trust themselves altogether with HIM, they could not allow themselves to reason in this way, and contrive beforehand how many wrong things they might do, and how many right ones leave undone, and yet have a chance of obtaining mercy through HIM. Real love and trust would render them at once ashamed of all such thoughts.

You may know it by your feelings to an earthly benefactor. Should you think it gratitude, to be contriving beforehand how little you might do of what you know he delights in, without forfeiting his favour for the future? By the same rule, you must condemn yourself of wanting faith in your Divine SAVIOUR, as often as you detect yourself saying in your heart, "Thus far will I go in sin, and no further."

Of all things, beware of such a temper; for it is turning that which is the only hope of sinners, the very Cross of our LORD and SAVIOUR, into a fearful occasion of falling. Those who so play with God's mercy and judgment at once, what other can they look for in the great and dreadful hour, than to hear HIM, who came to be their SAVIOUR, calling them wicked and slothful servants, and ordering them into outer darkness?

Upon the whole, you must, I think, clearly see that the true doctrine of Faith in the SON of GOD—Practical Faith, the devotion of the heart and life;—this doctrine, rightly understood, neither takes any thing from His glory, nor encourages us in wil-

ful imperfection. The glory of His mercy is heightened, not lowered, by its being offered on that condition only, which He knows to be most necessary for our everlasting good. And as for those who take advantage of the gracious allowances of the Gospel to continue in any way wilfully imperfect, they do so after full warning, and at their own peril. Fearful indeed will their case be, but they will not have to say that they were hardly dealt with, since no words can be plainer than those, in which the first messenger of the Gospel followed up his declaration of life to the believer; "He that believeth on the SON hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the SON shall not see life, but the wrath of GOD abideth on him."

Whatever you do, be not, I beseech you, led away by the vain notion, that you at least are not unbelievers; and therefore these last words do not concern you. You are required to believe the SON of GOD; that is, you are required, first, to attend to His words; secondly, to receive them as real truth; thirdly, to declare this belief by your words and actions. Now, how many, young and old, are thoughtless, and never seriously attend to the words of our SAVIOUR! Of course, they cannot be said to believe HIM. How many listen and mark the words as something very wise and good, but do not receive them as spoken to themselves! These too are unbelievers, for they will not take the message as they know in their hearts our SAVIOUR meant it. Lastly, how many hear, and think a little; but when it comes to doing, their behaviour speaks for them, and shows too plainly that they too believe not the SON.

With so many chances of failure before our eyes—failure in our one great concern, the salvation of our souls and bodies for ever;—what manner of persons ought we to be in all humble mistrust of ourselves, and earnest prayer for that Grace, by which alone we may hope gradually to grow more faithful in an unbelieving world. A Grace which no hypocrite may depend on, but which was never yet denied to any who sought for it sincerely in the Name of JESUS CHRIST.

SERMON XCVII.

ST. PETER'S FALL.

ST. MATT. xxvi. 75.

“ He went out, and wept bitterly.”

As we draw nearer the end of Lent, the Cross of our LORD JESUS CHRIST comes as it were more and more clearly into our view; by virtue of which Cross alone, the truest repentance can ever be accepted in the sight of the Most Holy God: but there are gathered around that blessed Cross, certain patterns or examples of repentance, true and false; and by diligently studying these we may, through God's blessing, come to know more and more of the true nature and meaning of that repentance, which we ourselves must be for ever practising, lest we forfeit and make void for ourselves the saving virtue of His Blood, in itself sufficient for the Redemption of the whole world.

The most remarkable of these examples of true repentance is undoubtedly that of St. Peter; and there are reasons, if I mistake not, why at this particular time it is especially worthy of attention on the part of Christian men. The Evil Spirit is continually trying to persuade men, that entire repentance, even in those who have sinned grievously after Baptism, is an easy thing, may be set about when we will, and repeated as often as we please, even after any number of grievous relapses. Thus he encourages men, first to put off their repentance altogether, and then to be satisfied with a very weak and feeble repentance.

Against this, the deadliest perhaps of his snares, St. Peter's

example of all others ought to warn all Christian people. We will first consider the circumstances of his fall at large, and then see how the history applies to the case of those who sin wilfully after Baptism, and to the abatement of the false hopes, which they commonly ground on a poor and easy repentance of man's teaching, instead of humbly submitting themselves to the repentance revealed from God in Holy Scripture.

First, then, as to the history of St. Peter's sad fall. The ground and occasion of it unquestionably was, his indulging too much the sanguine, confident temper, which seems to have been part of the natural character of his mind. He was, to use a familiar expression, from the beginning, rather "young of his age:" inclined to be carried away by the feeling of the moment, and to reject, with a kind of disdain, any notion that he might hereafter feel and think of things, very differently from what he did just then.

Thus, after that our LORD had fed five thousand with five loaves and two fishes, and had spoken to His disciples of Himself, as the true bread from Heaven, in such a way that some of them were offended and walked no more after HIM, and HE said to the Twelve, "Will ye also go away?" it was St. Peter out of all their number, who spoke out most immediately, and made that good confession, "LORD, to whom shall we go? THOU hast the words of eternal life; and we believe and are sure that THOU art that CHRIST, the SON of the living GOD." And the very night before, when JESUS came to His Disciples walking on the sea, it was St. Peter alone, out of their whole assembly, who was most eager to come to our LORD. "LORD, if it be THOU, bid me come to THEE on the water." No doubt, he thought himself, at the moment, quite safe; he had no idea that his faith would fail; but presently, "seeing the wind boisterous, he was afraid, and beginning to sink cried, saying, LORD, save me!" It should seem that HE who so graciously, and so immediately, answered that prayer, putting forth His hand and holding him up, with the mild reproof, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"—HE, on purpose, allowed the whole of what then happened to take place, in order to show St. Peter to himself, to warn him in good time of his own weakness.

A little after, HE spoke to him yet more sharply, when St.

Peter, in his earnest affection to our LORD, had refused to believe that HE could possibly be given up to His enemies, and have to undergo shame, pain, and death ; “ Be it far from THEE, LORD, this shall not be unto THEE.” The way in which our LORD replied to this is very emphatical. “ When HE had turned and looked on His Disciples,” doubtless with that earnest look, with which HE was used to regard them, when HE wished most to fix their attention ; “ HE saith unto Peter, Get thee behind ME, Satan ; thou art an offence unto ME ; for thou savourest not the things that be of GOD, but those that be of man.” As if HE had said, “ You little think that in thus shrinking from the thought of My Cross, you are in fact taking the devil’s part, and, as far as it goes, doing his work. Your thoughts are yet all earthly, not at all heavenly ; you are expecting to behold your Master high in the pomp and power of this world, and therefore you will not endure the doctrine of His sufferings ; all this proves you yet in a very imperfect mind.”

It is remarkable that this reproof came presently after a very glorious confession of St. Peter’s, when our LORD having asked, first, what other people thought of HIM, the SON of MAN, and then what His Apostles thought, received from St. Peter, more eager as usual than the rest, the famous acknowledgment, “ THOU art the CHRIST, the SON of the living GOD.” Whereupon our LORD had not only pronounced a blessing on him, “ Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my FATHER which is in heaven :” but HE also added that great and special reward, that on him, as on one of the chief stones, the foundation of the Church should be laid ; that Church which shall never pass away : “ Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” I say, it is very remarkable, that immediately after this encouraging praise, and favouring prophecy, of our LORD, St. Peter spoke in such a way of the Cross, on receiving a hint of it, as to bring on himself the severe rebuke, “ Get thee behind me, Satan.” He was, possibly, too much elated by the express declaration of our LORD’s distinguishing favour, and refused to submit himself meekly to the teaching of that precious Death, which was to be Life to him and to all men.

For indeed JESUS CHRIST treated him, then and always, as one of His most highly favoured; admitting him with James and John to the secret, as well of His miracles as of His sufferings. And accordingly in the Gospel of St. John we find St. Peter mentioned in the following way; "Simon Peter, and the other Disciple whom JESUS loved;" signifying that besides St. John himself, St. Peter was of all the Apostles an object of most especial tender regard from our SAVIOUR. It should seem, then, as if finding himself so favoured, even the great Apostle could not sufficiently keep his own sanguine temper in order. He was like almost all who are highly favoured either by GOD or man, tempted to have too much confidence in himself.

But of this God's merciful Providence effectually cured him, by permitting him to fall into this great sin, of denying his Master, after so many warnings. For in order to make the fall more inexcusable, our SAVIOUR had told him over and over again,—that is to say, HE had told him three times on the night before HE was crucified,—that before cock-crowing, before three o'clock the next morning, he should deny HIM,—St. Peter should disown and renounce our LORD as his Master,—three several times.

Our SAVIOUR first assured St. Peter of this when HE had been washing His Disciples' feet, and urged on them His farewell commandment of love towards one another. St. Peter in his affectionate way, not enduring to hear our LORD talk of farewell, said he would not be separated from HIM; he would follow HIM now; he was ready to lay down his life for CHRIST's sake. "JESUS answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for My sake? Verily, verily I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow till thou hast denied ME thrice." This was before the Paschal Supper, just after our LORD had washed His Disciples' feet.

Again whilst they were at supper, HE having just promised to the faithful among His Apostles, as a reward for their continuing with HIM in his temptations, that they and their successors the Bishops, should have the chief government of His Church, the highest places in His kingdom, eating and drinking at His Table, and sitting on thrones to judge His people—our LORD I say having just promised this, His divine soul was affected, as it seems, with the thought of the extreme danger those favoured ones were just about to fall into, when they should be tempted to

forsake His Cross. "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. And he said, LORD, I am ready to go with THEE, both into prison, and to death." But JESUS said; "I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow till thou hast denied ME thrice."

Yet again, when the supper was quite over, and our LORD was on His way with the chosen Apostles to the garden where HE suffered agony and was betrayed, HE then most openly of all cautioned St. Peter, and in him all who are inclined to have trust in themselves, "All ye shall be offended because of ME this night." And when St. Peter, more forward and sanguine than the rest, came forward with his usual earnest protestation, "Though all shall be offended, yet will not I; though I should die with THEE, yet will I not deny THEE;" our LORD again repeated His warning, laying especial stress upon the circumstance of the cock-crowing, in order that it might be a kind of sign or token, when it happened, to recall the saint to himself. Thus we see, that up to the very last moment, when he was to be put to the proof, our LORD never ceased warning His favoured servant of the frailty of his good resolutions, and that St. Peter never ceased professing to serve HIM, apparently with too much confidence in himself.

Now then observe the process of the temptation and trial, under which the Apostle's firmness, on which he depended so much, and which his LORD taught him was so little to be depended on, presently almost gave way. First, our SAVIOUR took him with St. James and St. John, to be as it were His body-guard or sentinels, to watch by HIM whilst HE was engaged in intense devotion, yielding Himself to His FATHER's will. Here first St. Peter shewed some weakness, whether of body or of mind, or of both; for being exhausted and low-spirited, they all sank down in sleep, at the moment when, humanly speaking, it was most important for them to have kept awake. By their not doing so, Judas had an opportunity of coming on His MASTER (as the world thought) unawares, and betraying HIM into their hands. And again, as the Disciples did not resist the natural desire of sleep, but gave way to it, they wanted in some

measure that enduring grace and help from above, which God would surely have bestowed on them, had they prayed earnestly; and when tribulation arose for their LORD's sake, presently after, as the Jews took HIM and led HIM away, they were at once "offended," or led into sin; "they all forsook HIM and fled," finding that HE did not mean to defend HIMSELF, or to be defended with the sword of earthly warfare.

They all forsook their MASTER and fled, and St. Peter among the rest; so far, however, his sin does not appear worse than that of the rest; only it is the more remarkable, and the more instructive to consider, on account of the earnest promises he had made of avoiding it. And it seems, among other instruction, to convey this serious warning to us all, that we prepare ourselves in our good resolutions to follow and obey CHRIST unreservedly; not marking out, as it were, in our thoughts beforehand, a particular path, in which if HE lead us, we will abide with HIM, but not else; not taking for granted in our good resolutions, that such and such means will surely be in our power, such and such blessings be still granted us: for if we depend on these or any outward thing, sooner or later, in more or less degree, what we depend on is sure to fail us, and then our course of thought will be put out of order, and we shall hardly know what to do, say, or imagine; and any temptation which the Enemy may have leave to bring on us at that moment, will find us terribly unprepared, and will be inexpressibly dangerous.

Thus St. Peter, and probably all the Twelve, expecting that our LORD should immediately set up such an earthly monarchy as their fancies had framed, had prepared themselves thoroughly to serve HIM faithfully in that kingdom; but when they began to perceive that His true kingdom was a state of great trial only, and not of soldierlike enterprise; when they gathered from His own expressions, that their cause was, in a manner, given up to the Evil Spirit for a time; that it was the hour of CHRIST's enemies and of the power of darkness; then with one accord they all forsook HIM and fled. If they had been more attentive to our LORD's warnings, or if they had forced themselves to keep awake, in order to pray earnestly for His good SPIRIT, possibly their good resolutions might have proved of a more stable and enduring kind; they might have resolved to stand by our LORD, not in

doing only, for which St. Peter shewed himself prepared, when he smote a servant of the high-priest and cut off his ear, but also in suffering, for which he and all showed themselves unprepared, when they forsook their LORD and fled.

Let us then always endeavour, in our good resolutions, to be prepared for any change of circumstances which God's Providence may bring upon us; not to be disconcerted or discouraged, nor refuse to serve HIM at all, because we find that we cannot serve HIM in the particular way we at first intended.

But we must go on with the account of St. Peter's fall. Though he fled at first with the other Apostles, it seems that he recovered himself presently, at least in part, and followed the persecutors as they led his MASTER away, afar off, even to the high-priest's palace, and came in, and sat with the servant to see the end. This might, to be sure, have been mere curiosity; but the whole cast of St. Peter's character makes us rather think his conduct to have arisen from true loyal affection to our SAVIOUR, to whom, though he could do no good in His great extremity, yet he was anxious to keep as close to HIM as he could; to stay with HIM, and have HIM in sight, to the end. In this respect, then, St. Peter's conduct appears more loyal and brave than that of the other Apostles, excepting indeed the beloved Disciple, St. John, for he too followed his MASTER quite into the high-priest's palace; but perhaps there might not be the same courage in his doing so as in St. Peter's, because he, St. John, was known to the high-priest, and might hope for favour, if notice were taken of him.

However, so it was, that St. John's then introducing St. Peter into the high-priest's hall, gave occasion to St. Peter, for the first time, openly to deny and disavow our SAVIOUR. For when St. John was bringing him in, through the interest which he, as an acquaintance, had with the servant, "then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man's disciples? He saith, I am not." This was the first denial, and it really seems to have been occasioned by an overearnest desire to get into the hall, and remain there near his MASTER. Such falsehoods are told every day for the sake of mere matters of expediency or fancy, much more to save one's life, and people think very little of them: but St. Peter, you see, accounted them worth bitter tears.

It must be owned, indeed, that his two following denials were more like presumptuous sin. As our LORD's trial went on, the course of it seemed more and more unfavourable to HIM; one high-priest, Annas, put chains on HIM, and sent HIM to the other high-priest, Caiaphas; moreover, the men that held HIM, mocked and smote HIM; and while this was going on, it may be, St. Peter's countenance expressed something of that horror and grief which was natural, on beholding such treatment of his best FRIEND and SAVIOUR. However, then it was, that, for some reason or other, the servants and soldiers began again to suspect and attack St. Peter, and charge him with having been with JESUS of Nazareth; and he answered with an oath, "I do not know the man." The charge being repeated, and that by one who might have it in his power to bring him into trouble, viz. by a kinsman of the high-priest's servant, whose ear Peter cut off; he was more alarmed, and sinned more deliberately, declaring with repeated curses and oaths, "I know not this man of whom you speak."

Thus St. Peter openly, repeatedly, and of set purpose, denied CHRIST, and was ashamed of HIM before men. His vain confidence was the thing which led him altogether into this sin and danger, making him first rather boastful of his own good intentions, whereby he both hardened his own spirit, and tempted the Evil One, as it were, to tempt him. Next, self-confidence made St. Peter more neglectful of prayer, so that, when CHRIST looked to find him watching, he was heavy with sleep, not making the most of the few hours he had, to obtain the blessed help of God's SPIRIT, that he might stand in the sad trial. Accordingly, God deserted him, so far, for the time. He declared that he was none of that SAVIOUR's, to whom, if he had not belonged, he was aware in his heart that he could not have true life, neither in this world nor in the world to come. Such was St. Peter's fall, so little thought of by him a moment before; so bitterly thought of and deplored a moment after.

Observe now the manner and process of his recovery. "The LORD turned and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the LORD, how HE had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny ME thrice. And Peter went out and wept bitterly." The LORD JESUS, gracious and merciful, even with that look which searches out the reins and the hearts, did but

once turn towards His erring servant, and at once all His words of warning, seemingly so vain, came thronging into St. Peter's mind. One look was enough : he remembered how thoroughly he had been warned ; he felt how rashly he had neglected the warning ; and when he thought thereon, he wept bitterly. It was no common sort of repentance, but a bitter, painful state of mind. He was full of indignation, of clearing of himself, of fear, of vehement desire ; he acknowledged his fault, not only with his lips but in his life ; and his sin was ever before him, not only as a deep, hard point of doctrine, which it concerned men to know, but also as a miserable, melancholy, most humbling truth, the remembrance of which seemed as if it would abide by him, as did David's remorse, and keep him as long as he lived from ever being quite so happy or so light-hearted again.

This was holy St. Peter's penitence ; what is ours apt to be, when we have sinned like him ? This is too serious and too large a question to be answered fully at this time ; only there is one thing too plain and too material to be passed over ; and that is, that very few persons, however they sin, repent as St. Peter did. Compare only the grief which men feel, after any great transgression, with that which seizes them on the death of a dear friend, or the disappointment of a favourite scheme. How often have you been hindered in your sleep, or in your meals, by sorrow and humiliation for your sins, in comparison with the effect which worldly care or regret have had on you ? If this be so ;—if our sins, take them all together, are notoriously great and crying up to heaven, and yet our penitence, even among those who do practise it in some measure, is so very unlike the retirement, the deep thought, the bitter tears of St. Peter ;—does not this show that there is probably something wrong in our whole notion of repentance, and in that condition of ours which requires it so much ? What our usual mistake is, I will try to explain next Sunday ; and I beg your very particular attention to the subject, as no one thing, perhaps, so important, is so much mistaken. God, in the mean time, grant unto us all repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of, through JESUS CHRIST our LORD. Amen.

SERMON XCVIII.

ST. PETER'S REPENTANCE.

ST. MATT. xxvi. 75.

“ He went out, and wept bitterly ”

LET us proceed to-day with an endeavour to compare St. Peter's repentance with our own, and find out what some of the errors are, which in our days make true repentance so very rare, and innocence, baptismal innocence, so much rarer.

And first of all, with regard to these bitter tears of the penitent Apostle, concerning which we read in the text, it is very plain that if he had gone by the received maxims of men in cases like his, he had very little occasion to weep at all; certainly none to weep so much more bitterly than the generality of fallen Christians weep for their sins. For what is there to be said in excuse of those daily backslidings and disobediences, which most of us are in the habit of passing over so very slightly, which might not have been said to and of St. Peter, when he was afflicting his soul so sharply on account of his denial of our LORD? Might not he have said to himself, or might not St. John, who was there, have said to him—had St. John been as false a comforter to St. Peter as ordinary sinners are apt to be to each other—might it not have been said of St. Peter's fall, more truly than of most sins, that “ the temptation came suddenly upon him; ” that “ he was taken unawares; ” that his danger was great in confessing our LORD,

and, as far as could be seen, no great advantage could come of it ? That, after all, he had been truer and more loyal to his MASTER than any other of the Apostles, except St. John ; that if he did sin grievously, yet he made haste to recover ; whereas so many other persons go on for months and weeks impenitent, instead of remembering themselves, and weeping bitterly, as he did, at the first signal from his LORD and MASTER, the first earnest look of JESUS CHRIST ? Might not St. Peter, if ever man could, very well have flattered himself with the thought, that he was an especial favourite (if the word may be allowed) of his Divine MASTER ? that, great as his sin might be, he was in a manner sure of forgiveness, since HE had prayed for him, none of whose prayers to His FATHER ever can go up unheard, or in vain ? CHRIST, St. Peter knew, had prayed for him, that his faith fail not ; had spoken to him of his future conversion, or return to a better mind ; and had bidden him, after that, to strengthen his brethren. What was there to hinder his saying to himself, “ After all, though my fall is shameful, yet GOD I know will not finally cast me away. I have no need then to practise any bitter repentance, no occasion to vex myself with severe self-denial, to wear sackcloth, and go very humbly.”

We may, I think, very well imagine St. Peter himself, or some inconsiderate friend for him, making light of his sin in this way ; but very different are all such imaginations from the true account of the penitent Apostle's behaviour. “ He went out and wept bitterly.” He seems to have sat alone, humbling himself for his great transgression, to the moment when he heard of his LORD's Sepulchre being open, and the stone rolled away. We hear nothing of him as having been near the Cross at the moment of our LORD's giving up the ghost ; if he had been, he certainly would have been mentioned together with the other highly favoured witnesses of CHRIST's death. But in all probability St. Peter was then bearing his own cross in solitude and silence. So grieved was he and vexed with himself for his hasty denial of the LORD who bought him, that the merciful SAVIOUR thought proper, even before HE had appeared to any, to send him a message of comfort by an Angel, lest he be swallowed up with over much sorrow. For the Angel, who by the Providence of GOD appeared to the holy women first, sent this message to St. Peter, “ Go, tell His

Disciples," and especially "Peter, that HE is risen from the dead." Why this particular message to St. Peter by name, except because just then he more than the others required to be assured of his LORD's gracious purpose towards him, and that his sin, great as it was, had not entirely separated between him and his SAVIOUR? And accordingly we find that St. Peter was the first of the Apostles, to whom JESUS, risen, graciously appeared face to face. HE, in whose presence there is joy over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety-nine just ones that need no repentance; HE made haste to see His erring, but deeply-repenting servant, and to assure him that HE was ready to forgive, and most willing to pardon him.

All these are so many sure signs of St. Peter's very deep and earnest contrition; they show how little account he made of those vulgar and ordinary excuses, by which we too generally quiet our consciences for much greater sins, much longer continued than his. He, to use the expression of the Prophet Jeremiah, one of the great teachers of repentance in the old time, he "sate alone and kept silence;" he "put his mouth in the dust, if so be there might be hope." We, on the contrary, too generally make all haste to be easy and comfortable again; there is in our tears no fear, no zeal, no bitterness; and of course our repentance itself is too often imperfect, and too many of us, it is to be feared, go down to our graves without any thing like a due sense of our condition.

What is the chief reason of this great and alarming difference? Why are our measures of repentance so unlike his, who is held out to us by the New Testament as a pattern of recovery after a grievous relapse? The reason, one principal reason at least, may be given, I suppose, in two words. St. Peter wept bitterly, because he had a right notion of the honour and happiness from which he had fallen by his sin; we have dry eyes, or weep however and repent superficially, because we have not right notions of the baptismal innocency from which our sins have parted us.

We have seen what plenty of plausible excuses St. Peter, had he so pleased, might have found, wherewith to quiet those bitter tears of his; but he took none of them, he would listen to none, because he felt too deeply what a mere nothing they all were, set against the great and blessed privilege, which he had enjoyed, of

abiding so near his SAVIOUR, of being His friend, and receiving daily even visible blessings from HIM. Is it not certain that we too, every one of us, how entirely soever we have suffered it to pass from our minds; yet is it not certain that we too have been brought nearer than heart can conceive to our LORD and SAVIOUR? that HE has "taken us up into His arms, put His hands upon us, and blessed us?" that having been "baptized into CHRIST," we have "put on CHRIST?" that we have been "washed, sanctified, justified, in the Name of the LORD JESUS and by the SPIRIT of our GOD?" that we have been baptized, and born again of water and of the HOLY GHOST, and were freed thereby from the curse and bondage of sin? that CHRIST, when we were little children, "sanctified and cleansed us with the washing of water by the Word," or Name of the FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST, pronounced over us in the moment of our Baptism? that GOD hath "saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the HOLY GHOST?" Are not all these things as certain as that we in our infancy were baptized, and that the Scriptures of GOD are true?

But if these things be indeed so; if Baptism to every infant whatever be really and truly an incorporation into CHRIST; if to infants it do most assuredly convey Regeneration, Justification, the beginning of Sanctification; then, inasmuch as we were baptized in our infancy, we know that we have been regenerated and justified, and that GOD has begun to sanctify us. Then, and at that moment, did the ALMIGHTY fulfil to us those great and precious promises, which in Holy Scripture are vouchsafed to all men entering into communion with JESUS CHRIST. Then were conveyed to us the heavenly blessings of entire forgiveness of sin, and deliverance from its power; those blessings of which our LORD's most astonishing miracles, the cleansing of the leper, the healing of the paralytic, the raising of the dead, were but shadows, and types, and figures.

If this be so, then our sins after Baptism must be so far like the sin of St. Peter; that they too were committed after our being brought near to CHRIST, and after our being admitted not only to partake *with* HIM, but also to partake *of* HIM. So much the more grievous are they, and so much the harder will it prove to repent of them thoroughly. They are not like the sins of heathens,

but much worse; yet the sins of heathens we know were inexcusable, and the wrath of God was revealed from Heaven against them. But the sins of Christians are much worse, just as the idolatry of the Jews was more offensive to the ALMIGHTY than the like idolatry in the nations around them; as HE Himself warned them more than once: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities." And again, "That which cometh into your minds shall not be at all, that ye say, We will be as the heathen, the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone." In like manner is it said to Christians in the New Testament, "It were better for you not to have known the way of righteousness, than after you have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto you." And again, "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, and returns, the last state of that man is worse than the first."

And this, not only because of what common sense teaches, that the more a man knows of his duty the more inexcusable are his transgressions; but also because Holy Baptism is, according to the method of God's covenant of grace, the one ordained way of freeing us for ever from the guilt and stain of that sin in which we were born, as well as of all our past sins; and there is no promise, that after forfeiting our first baptismal purity by wilful sin, we shall ever again be restored in this world to the condition in which we were when just baptized. Nay, it seems to have been generally thought by the old Fathers of CHRIST'S Holy Catholic Church, that St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, where he speaks of some whom it was "impossible to renew again unto repentance," meant not those guilty of any one deadly sin in particular, but generally all those who fall into any grievous crime, or any wilful habit of sin and irreligion, after they have been once baptized. "It is impossible for those who have been once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly Gift, and were made partakers of the HOLY GHOST, and have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance." To be once for all enlightened, to taste the heavenly Gift, and be made partakers of the HOLY GHOST, to taste the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come, are so many graces conveyed in Holy Bap-

tism ; as will plainly appear on comparing those expressions with the ordinary way in which the Apostles speak of the condition of baptized Christians. Falling away then, after such illumination, is falling away after Baptism ; and when St. Paul says of persons so backsliding, that it is impossible to renew such again unto repentance, he gives the very highest notion of baptismal privileges ; he means to warn us that the purity and inward brightness which the HOLY SPIRIT by the font conveys to man's soul, is such as never can be thoroughly recovered in this life, when the sanctified soul and body has been stained again by wilful transgression of God's Law. He does not say that it is impossible for such to repent, or by true repentance to obtain final forgiveness :—God forbid !—but he does say that it is impossible to *renew* them again unto repentance. The Gospel covenant provides no way for their restoration in this life to the joy and glory of that innocency, which God gave them for CHRIST's sake, when they were regenerated and created in Baptism.

Blessed be God, they may repent and amend, and if they do so thoroughly, they will surely be forgiven ; but their repentance will be a slow, and painful, and difficult, and anxious work. The stain, by God's grace, may wear out in time, but it will not wear out in a moment ; and where the sin which caused it was grievous and habitual, it must not be expected to wear out as long as we are on this side the grave ; neither must we expect to be quite assured of pardon, as a new baptized person is, until he has stained his baptismal robe again ; neither may we read those places of Holy Scripture, which speak of the infinite blessings of our Christian condition, with the same unmingled joy and exultation of heart, as those may who have watched and kept their garments ; the remembrance of our fall had need be ever before us, ever exercising us in mortification and self-denial, in mean thoughts of ourselves, and in submission to the chastisements of God.

In a word, those who have fallen after Baptism should consider themselves ever after as in a state of Penance, should be ever going on in that discipline which St. Paul describes as the employment of the Christians at Corinth, when they had forfeited God's favour by conniving at deadly sin. They “sorrowed after a godly sort ;” and this sorrow wrought in them seriousness, and

self-reproach, and fear, and a longing to improve, and a holy emulation of their betters, and great self-denial. This ought to be the life of those who have forfeited their baptismal innocence; they should dwell all their life afterwards rather in the house of mourning than in the house of feasting; they should fast rather than indulge their appetite; be silent, rather than make loud professions of goodness; shrink from the favourable notice and praise of men; and dread all teaching of every kind, which, instead of this true doctrine of the Cross, would lead them to rely on strong feelings, emotions, or assurances, or on any other superficial shadow of repentance.

All this is quite plain from Scripture, if men would be content to judge from Scripture only; but so it is, that unknown to ourselves, we are influenced by what we see in the world about us; we do not see baptized persons in general, living as those who are delivered for ever from the bondage of sin, and therefore we find it hard to believe that such deliverance really happens in baptism. Again, when any person has broken through an evil habit of sin and irreligion, and begun, long after his baptism, to turn to GOD in good earnest, there is often a seeming joy and satisfaction of heart, an overflowing sense of God's goodness, and of devotion to CHRIST; and on these feelings we are tempted to depend too entirely, as though these, and not holy Baptism, were the seal and mean of our sanctification, justification, regeneration; as if up to that time our sins were the sins of unenlightened heathens, and need not be hereafter, in any great degree, matter of care and repentance to us; as if also, whatever sins we may ever afterwards fall into from time to time, still, as often as we shall be enabled to renew in ourselves these same feelings of seeming earnest devotion, so often we may depend upon entire forgiveness and restoration to the favour of our reconciled FATHER in CHRIST JESUS, and to the full benefit of His holy and life-giving SPIRIT.

Thus in two ways we deceive ourselves, and our fault in both is, want of entire faith, our choosing to trust that which, as we think, we see with our eyes, rather than what we read of in the inspired Word of GOD. We deceive ourselves first by undervaluing holy Baptism, because we do not see its good effects; and, secondly,

by overvaluing our own faith and good feelings, because they do in some way make themselves sensible and present to us. And both errors have a most fatal effect on our repentance and progress in holy obedience.

This is seen every day, first by the very slight and easy way in which we are apt to bewail our own ordinary sins, even when we cannot deny them to be wilful presumptuous sins; wilful, inasmuch as we know them to be sins, and presumptuous, inasmuch as we have gone on indulging them so long, that they are now become ordinary and habitual to us. For instance, take the sin of profane swearing; how lightly do those who are guilty of it own their guilt, in words, from time to time, without any the least real distress of heart; and if their better thoughts do at last prevail against the bad habit, and they quite break themselves of it, (which in such cases is very rare,) they are well contented with themselves, and think they have done great things, instead of passing the rest of their time in sad thoughts, how near they have been throwing themselves away for ever, even out of their LORD's arms, into which HE had received them by Baptism.

Secondly, we see but too plainly, how slight and superficial men's ordinary repentance is, by their ordinarily relapsing into the same or worse sins: whereby in the end their hearts become seared, and they give themselves over, like the Gentiles, which know not God, to commit all uncleanness with greediness. Could this be, nearly so often as it is, if repentance had been from the beginning taught men on right principles? If children from their very infancy were instructed to reverence their own souls and bodies, as the living Temples of the HOLY GHOST, who in Baptism descended on them; could they think so carelessly, when they come to age, of the fearful guilt they bring on themselves, when they allow the beginnings of pollution in the same hallowed souls and bodies? Could they weep otherwise than bitterly for such profane impurity, when their conscience accuses them of it? knowing and remembering, as they would in that case, that they have now but one choice left:—deep and bitter penitence as long as they live, or everlasting destruction in the world to come. And having these true thoughts of the sin of impurity and its deadly effects, would they not be more on their guard against any relapse into it? would they not fast, and pray,

and weep, and deny themselves pleasures, which to others might be innocent, lest their hearts be unawares overcharged with earthly thoughts, and stolen from God, and they fall again into the sin which they know they never can sufficiently repent of?

But men will not believe the Church and the Scriptures, telling us of the unspeakable gift which we receive from God in our Baptism. Men will not believe that they are then truly made members of CHRIST, children of GOD, and inheritors of the kingdom of Heaven. Consequently they think far less than they ought of the forfeiture of their baptismal purity : it is, to their minds, as easy to repent, and to please God by repentance, after such a downfall, as for a heathen to repent of his sins done in heathenism, and so to come and be baptized. They think little, therefore, of the first fall, and still less of the second ; and so sin and condemnation go on, until this world is over, and all hope with it.

But let us suppose that, by God's unspeakable mercy, we are preserved from this great peril of relapsing after repentance ; yet our repentance itself is too likely to be spoiled by an unhappy mixture of spiritual pride and self-confidence. Do we not often see men who have lived for a long time like heathens, without God in the world, when any thing happens to make them more serious, and sober them in thought and conduct, how apt they are presently to leave off that fear and trembling, which becomes persons who have brought themselves into such imminent jeopardy ? They remember indeed their past sins, and speak of them, it may be, not seldom ; not however in the language of true humility, but rather so magnifying their present deliverance, as to shew that they look on it as a sign of GOD ALMIGHTY's partial favour towards them. They apply to themselves, and to their own late and scanty repentance, all the promises which the Gospel holds out to those who receive Holy Baptism rightly for the first time. Thus reckoning their own condition safe, they go on with little or no scruple to pass sentence on that of their brethren ; in which, and in a self-pleasing way they have of watching their own inward feelings, they find such full employment, that they have small leisure to attend to and correct their practice ; and so they too often go down to the very grave, thoroughly well satisfied with them-

selves, while, if we judge by the Gospel rule, their works, we can only suppose their repentance but just begun. So cunning is Satan, where he cannot quite hinder men's improvement, to spoil and mar it by causing them to account it perfect, when it is in fact only the first rude beginning of a long process, which must ever be imperfect in this world.

Thus, my Brethren, I have endeavoured to show you the reason, why the penitence, even of most real penitents, is so very unlike that of St. Peter; why so few of us weep bitterly, and pass our time in fear and trembling, though we cannot deny that we have been guilty of deadly sin after Baptism. The reason clearly is, there are very few of us, who rightly consider what Scripture plainly teaches concerning baptismal blessings. They do not consider how much is necessarily required, in those who have been enlightened, and tasted of the heavenly Gift, and made partakers of the HOLY GHOST, and have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come. They only consider and compare with their own feelings the feelings and conduct of others, whom they believe to have been from time to time called by God to faith and grace, and so to have received entire deliverance from their sins; and if they see in themselves the same signs as in those supposed favoured ones of CHRIST, they look no further; they account all safe.

Thus the measure and standard of Christian holiness becomes gradually lower and lower; and instead of weeping bitterly with St. Peter, persons who are but just beginning to recover themselves from a course of denying CHRIST a thousand times worse than his, permit their friends to speak of them as great saints, and venture almost to cry out with St. Paul, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

But let us be prevailed on to lose no time in measuring our conduct by our baptismal vows. If you find that you have not materially broken them, then watch over yourself with a thankful heart, but with all possible jealousy, knowing that against such as you the Evil Spirit is particularly active. If, on the other hand, we find ourselves, with too many, sadly fallen away from our baptismal integrity, then let us make haste to repent, and be never satisfied with our own repentance; let us not look to comfort and satisfaction, temporal or spiritual, in this world, but

look on to the eternal world, and be content to have reasonable, but sad and serious, hope of obtaining full consolation there.

Of this one thing we may all be well assured ; that if with St. Peter we would have the benefit of our LORD's graciously looking towards us, we must with the same St. Peter not rashly intrude into the place of great saints, but be content to wait at the door, and muse, and weep, and deny ourselves, as long as it shall please GOD to continue us in this world of doubt and trial.

SERMON XCIX.

CHRIST, A REDEEMER FROM SIN.

ST. LUKE i. 74, 75.

“ That we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve HIM without fear, in holiness and righteousness before HIM, all the days of our life.”

I WISH all those who go regularly to Church could only be persuaded to lay to heart and remember the Church Services which fall on their ears so often. It seems but a little thing, but if it were really practised, I know not how much difference it would make in the condition of those who would practise it towards God: how much more true religion and godliness there would be around us than there now is.

To take a plain instance, which every one who hears can understand, do we not in this Church continually in the Morning Service make the following confession to our SAVIOUR: “ We believe that THOU shalt come to be our Judge?” Are not those words quite plain? Is any thing easier than to learn and understand them, even though you cannot read a letter? Nay, is it possible to help learning and understanding them, if people will but go constantly, and constantly attend to what the minister is saying? And yet if you would but lay to heart and remember those few easy words, it would make all the difference to you; you could not lead your life in wilful unbelief and irreligion; you could not go on fancying that your time, your money, or any thing else, was your own to do whatever you please with: in a word, you would think, speak, and behave, as if the JUDGE

was in sight on His Throne : and would not this make a great change for the better in your thoughts, speech, and behaviour ?

I have mentioned an instance which I think must strike every one, because the words are so plain, and so awful, and so very often used. I will now mention another, not so plain, because not so often used : but any one who will please to attend will see, I think, clearly, that these words also contain in them what, if duly attended to, would correct a thousand mistaken notions, and turn thousands of unstable souls into sound believers and hopeful servants of God.

The words I mean are those of the text, “ That we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve HIM without fear, in holiness and righteousness before HIM, all the days of our life.” They are taken out of the thanksgiving hymn of Zacharias, the father of St. John the Baptist ; which hymn, as you know, begins “ Blessed be the LORD God of Israel,” and is appointed by the Church to be used every morning, after the Second Lesson, by turns with the hundredth Psalm : the most joyful, perhaps, of the Psalms of David taking its turn with this, one of the first of the Christian hymns.

This hymn we use more especially, as you may have observed, during that half-year which commemorates one after another the things which our Blessed LORD vouchsafed to do and suffer here on earth. It seems most natural then to use it, being as it is a hymn taught by the HOLY GHOST Himself, wherewith to honour the coming of our LORD and SAVIOUR in the flesh. And I would wish it very often used, and very particularly attended to, were it only for the sake of this one verse, in which the holy father of St. John the Baptist describes the great purpose of our LORD’s coming : namely, “ That we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve HIM without fear, in holiness and righteousness before HIM, all the days of our life.”

These, I say, are words apt to do away with an infinite number of errors : for these words teach us that our deliverance by CHRIST is a deliverance not only from the punishment, but also from the power of sin. The case is not, as too many seem to imagine, and not a few, in some way or other, teach, that men ought indeed to be really good and holy, but that their being so is out of the question, the temptations of the world being so

many, and the nature of man so weak and corrupt as it is : this is not so now, whatever it might have been to those of old who were without CHRIST : but now we baptized Christians are delivered once for all out of the hands of our enemies, and may serve HIM if we will “without fear, in holiness, and righteousness before HIM, all the days of our life.” We are no longer to plead the corruption we inherit from Adam as an excuse for wilful imperfection ; we may lead holy, just, and pure lives, if we will.

This same truth, that CHRIST’s redemption sets us free not only from the punishment, but also from the power of sin, is clearly taught by our Blessed LORD in what HE said so earnestly about taking up the cross. Over and over again HE presses it, as absolutely necessary to salvation through HIM. “If any man will come after ME, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow ME.” Observe, it is not only the most perfect ones, such as those who were required to sell all that they had and give to the poor, but it is, “*whosoever* will come after ME.” As also in another place, “*whosoever* taketh not up his cross, and followeth after ME, is not worthy of ME.” Your own cross must be actually taken up and borne after our SAVIOUR. Without sincerely doing so, and that daily, you do but vainly trust in His Cross. The deliverance wrought by HIM there was not meant for a sort of persons who should simply put their trust in HIM, but in other things continue just as they were. It was rather meant for those, and those only, who by His grace should strive to become, as St. Paul speaks, conformed to the likeness of His sufferings. The Cross saves us, but not without transforming us into the likeness of HIM who died there. This is the Scripture doctrine of the Cross ; that we are saved not by pure reliance on the merits of our LORD, but by a real and spiritual union with HIM, causing us to die to the world, and to live to HIM.

The same thing again is taught in the many places of the New Testament which speak so much of sanctification, and join it so closely with pardon and redemption. Thus St. Paul, speaking to the Corinthians of the true wisdom, which, as Christians, God had given them, instead of the heathen wisdom on which they were used to pride themselves :—“CHRIST JESUS,” says he, “is made

unto you of GOD wisdom," that is, "righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." CHRIST is our redemption, then, not by GOD's pardoning us through HIM, we continuing as we were; but by the HOLY SPIRIT's actually joining us to HIM, to make HIM, inwardly, righteousness and holiness to us. HE, dwelling in our hearts by faith, converts us by degrees into His own image, makes us righteous and holy like Himself: according as it is written, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." Therefore St. Paul speaks of the condition of Christians as one not of mere hope but of actual present salvation: "GOD," he says, "hath *saved* us, and called us with an holy calling." And the Catechism distinctly teaches every child to consider himself as being called by Baptism into not only a hope but a state of salvation.

Nor ought this to be considered impossible, nor ought any one to doubt the truth of the doctrine, on account of the many sins by which he may feel his own obedience every moment blotted and marred, or on account of the imperfections which he sees, or thinks he sees, in the very best of his brethren and their holiest works. What are we, any or all of us, that our doings, our experiences, should be a measure or standard whereby to try the saints of GOD and their doings and failings in all times and in all countries? Above all, what is the experience, I should say the fancied experience, of the whole world, set against the plain, unquestionable word of GOD?

The world, indeed, says positively, "Every man has his fault; and it is in vain to think of keeping your baptismal robe unstained, your first innocence which GOD gave you at the Font, clear of wilful and deadly sin: you may talk indeed of doing your best, but you can but sin and repent as others: and indeed to pretend to any thing more is a kind of affront to the merits of our LORD and SAVIOUR; it is pretending to be justified by works." Thus the world speaks; but what says the Scripture?

Look to him, whose words we are considering, the good Zacharias, father of St. John the Baptist. It is written of him, and of his wife Elisabeth, that even before the coming of our LORD, they were both righteous before GOD, and walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the LORD blameless. And observe by the way, how in this first of the New Testament Saints, GOD shows us the effect of righteousness in making men long to be

more righteous. Zacharias, we see, was "righteous before God:" not before men only; it was a real inward righteousness and holiness of heart, as well as an outward obedience to the commandments and ordinances of the LORD. What is it which he looks to as the greatest honour and favour which he could ask of the LORD, the sum and substance of that redemption, the dawning whereof was now being made clear to him by the HOLY SPIRIT of Prophecy? His reward, his notion of redemption, is the being made more righteous; he who had all his life long walked in the LORD's commandments blameless, now, as if all that is past were nothing, rejoices in the new prospect of serving HIM without fear in holiness and righteousness before HIM as long as he should live. Such is the quality of true holiness: it makes men ever long to be more holy; it counts all that is gone before as nothing; it forgets those things which are behind, and looks forward to those things which are before.

Such also were the thoughts of the Saints of the Old Testament, when they looked onward by the SPIRIT of Prophecy to the New. Near as they already were to GOD, they perceived how much nearer we Christians should be brought by Communion with HIM Incarnate. Yet they were truly, inwardly, good and righteous: the Scripture testifies it of them most clearly, saying, Noah was a just man, and walked with GOD: Abraham was justified, that is, made righteous, by faith, and was the friend of GOD: Moses was faithful in all his house; David was the man after His own heart; Daniel was greatly beloved; Job was a perfect man and an upright, fearing GOD and eschewing evil. These were not the opinions of men concerning them; they are the testimonies of HIM who knoweth the heart; and these all lived in times before HE came who is the LORD our Righteousness; before His regenerating SPIRIT had come down to dwell in His people's hearts: before His Church was set up, to make and keep us partakers of HIM, that is, partakers of the Divine Nature, by the two blessed sacraments. If then it was possible in those days for persons to walk blameless in the commandments and ordinances of the LORD, much more is it possible now; if Job and Noah were perfect and upright, much more may they be so, who are least in the Church: for such is the declaration of the SON of GOD: St.

John the Baptist was as great as the greatest of the Prophets, but he who is least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he.

In thus speaking of the real righteousness and holiness which the new Law of God, the Gospel, both requires and renders possible; do we at all contradict those Scriptures, which tell us so plainly of the frailty of our nature, and the sinfulness of our best deeds? "There is not a just man that liveth on earth and sinneth not." "The angels are not pure in His sight, how much less man that is a worm?"—"The just man," not merely he who is reckoned such by his fellow-men, "falleth seven times a day." Do we at all deny these sayings, by pressing those other sayings, which tell us so much of baptismal holiness, and of the necessity of really keeping God's commandments? Far from it; these sayings cannot possibly contradict one another, since the one sort as well as the other are alike taken out of Holy Scripture. Undoubtedly, no man living can be justified in the sight of God, were He extreme to mark what is done amiss: no man living could ever be at all just and holy if left to himself, without the sanctifying SPIRIT. Yet, by His grace and mercy, they who improve that HOLY SPIRIT, much more if they be Christians actually regenerated by HIM, may become really just and holy; their falls and slips may be limited to pardonable infirmities, such as CHRIST'S atoning goodness may entirely blot out at the last day.

Let it not, therefore, be doubted, but earnestly believed, that it is possible for those at least of us who have not yet fallen into habitual or deadly transgression, to do as much by the aid of the regenerating SPIRIT as Zacharias and Elisabeth did by the SPIRIT of sanctification in such measure as HE was given under the law. Let it not be doubted that such as have not grieved the SPIRIT whereby they were sealed, may, if they will, walk "in all the commandments and ordinances of the LORD blameless." Nay, let us be quite sure that no person rightly baptized is excusable if he fall short of this. For if he have not the aid of the good SPIRIT, it is because he has forfeited it by his own wilful transgression: and that of course makes his sin worse instead of excusing it.

Bearing in mind, then, that the state which the Psalmist, if one may so call Zacharias, describes in this verse, is indeed our own condition, and that of the whole Church of God, let us

consider the particulars which he, speaking by the HOLY GHOST, has taught us to believe of that condition.

First, it was to be a condition "without fear;" according to the description of it in the Epistle to the Hebrews: that CHRIST should "deliver them who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage:" according again to the saying of the Apostle St. John, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear:" that is, worldly, fleshly, natural fear; all fear but the fear of God. This would be our lot, had we truly kept our vow and covenant made to our God: we should be so accustomed, by His grace blessing our constant devotions, to set our hearts on things eternal, that no fear nor care about things temporal would have power greatly to discompose us: allowing, of course, for mere bodily infirmities, and the effect which they cannot but sometimes produce on the mind.

Now, only just consider what a difference this one circumstance would make in the Christian world; I mean, getting rid of those tormenting fears and anxieties, which now hurry and perplex men so, and drive them a thousand ways at once: think what a change, if, instead of these, people would agree to cast all their burdens on the LORD; and judge from that one thought, how far we in general must be gone from the holy temper, which Zacharias prophesied of as belonging of course to the Church.

Next, he shows on what this holy confidence, this peace of God, was to depend. His people were to be "without fear," because they should be "delivered out of the hand of their enemies." The evil spirits were not to approach to hurt them. The Prince of the power of the air, who worketh his own will in the children of disobedience, the Gentiles, was not to come near *them*. Their own corrupt natures, being effectually mortified by the power of the HOLY GHOST dwelling in them, and by their constant self-denial which they should practise according to their vow in Baptism, would no more get the dominion over them. The example of the wicked world would be nothing to them, whose heart and treasure were with their SAVIOUR in Heaven. In this respect again, deliverance from our enemies, we see clearly that Zacharias' prophecy, glorious as it sounds, and too good almost to be true in this world, is fulfilled in every child who by Baptism is taken out of the power of Satan unto God, and would

continue to be fulfilled in every one of us, had we been careful to continue such as God made us at our infant Baptism.

But this fearlessness and deliverance from enemies are what people call merely *negative* blessings : that is, Christian people, so far, it appears, are to be free from such and such evils ; but where is the *positive* good, the joy and consolation, which one should naturally expect to belong to the people of God ? The next word in the hymn tells us : “ it is altogether in serving God ; ”—serving HIM with a religious service ; for that is the proper meaning of the word here :—waiting on HIM as priests wait in His Temple. Let this again be thoughtfully considered ; for it may teach all Christians a great deal, and to the people of this generation I am sure it is particularly necessary. What I mean is this : Zacharias in the hymn is describing the kingdom of Heaven, the blessed condition into which the SAVIOUR of mankind was to bring His people at His coming. Now the very essence of the blessing, as he relates it, was that people should be left free without fear to serve God as His ministers serve HIM in his temple. The worship of God in His Church or Temple, Public Worship, that kind of worship in which Zacharias, as a priest, was regularly employed, and in which, no doubt, he placed his joy and consolation—this was to be the joy and consolation also of the children of God’s kingdom to the end of time. Religion, Church Services, Prayers, Psalms, Sacraments, were to be the business of their lives : every thing else, their business, their diversions, their dealings with their neighbours, their ways of ordering their families, the things they did, said, and thought in their daily walk, were to be such as should help to make them worthier for the grand employment and happiness of all—serving God in the congregation, kneeling at His altar, receiving the tokens of His blessed Body and Blood. This was Zacharias’ notion, or rather this was the account which the HOLY GHOST taught him to give, of the joy and comfort and favourite calling of a Christian :—to be, as St. John the Divine expresses it, a king and priest unto God, a king over himself, his unruly desires and fancies ; a priest, by offering himself, and all that belongs to him, a continual sacrifice to God, in union with the one meritorious sacrifice, once for all offered on the Cross.

But now if any person takes delight in thus making his whole

life a sacrifice of obedience to God through CHRIST, he will of course rejoice, whenever the time comes to realize, as it were, and embody that sacrifice more distinctly, by assisting at the public sacrifice of the Church, her prayers and psalms, her alms, and oblations. This being so, whenever we find great lukewarmness in the Church Service, many staying away entirely, very few attending regularly, many of those who do attend showing, by their careless and irreverent ways, that they come not as to a place of sacrifice, but rather to hear something new; whenever this is the truth concerning any place, we must needs think that the people of that place in general are far from the mind of Zacharias, that is, from the mind of the HOLY GHOST, of the Kingdom of Heaven. They do not feel it so great a privilege to "serve God without fear," to serve HIM as His Church does in His temple.

I wish they would consider in time, what sort of a preparation they are making for that place, the happiness whereof is described in such words, as show that no place on earth is so like it, as the inside of a church in the time of solemn service. The just in heaven are alone before God: they serve HIM day and night in His Temple: "they rest not day nor night, saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, LORD God of Hosts." It is a serious question, which most of us, I apprehend, would do well to put to themselves: "would this really be happiness to me? Have I not reason to fear that it would not, unless I took truer delight in the Church Service, and depended on it more, than I now do?"

"But," it will be said, "the service which God requires, is righteousness and holiness of life, as this very sentence of Zacharias shows: and not merely the public service of the Church." To be sure it is: nor does any one think of denying it. This is the very thing I am trying to teach; that the deliverance wrought for us all by JESUS CHRIST is not mere pardon, but sanctification—real holiness and righteousness of life, every day and all day long; in the field and in the market, as well as in the Church; at meal-times and in business, as well as at the hour of prayer. But observe; it is a sort of holiness which will always make those who have it fonder of the Church than of any other place. For what does this word, holiness, mean? It means, looking on yourself as sacred; as something belonging to God only and His

SON JESUS CHRIST. It is treating yourself and all others with all purity and reverence of heart, for this very reason, because all belong to GOD. Now, whoever has this mind really, will rejoice most in those places and employments which bring him nearest his GOD and SAVIOUR: and most of all in that place where CHRIST has promised to be, and in that holy Eucharistical Service wherein HE gives us Himself.

Depend on it, therefore, it is a great mistake to think that you can serve GOD worthily any where or at any time, as long as you care little about serving HIM in His Church, and count it a trifling loss when you cannot come here. Depend on it, again, that our going to church will but condemn us the more severely, if we do not strive to keep up the Church temper through the daily course of our lives. On the one hand, what we may fancy our righteousness will fail us if it be not joined with holiness, if it be not practised as before GOD: on the other, our occasional religious thoughts and feelings will prove mere self-flattery, if they do not make us strictly righteous, honest, kind, pure, and humble, every day and all day long.

GOD keep us from all self-deceit, and especially from the snare of setting up one part of duty against another! As in Baptism HE delivered us from our enemies, that we might serve HIM without fear, so may HE grant us a good conscience, that, according to our daily morning prayer, "we surely trusting in His defence, may not fear the power of any adversaries," nor fancy any temptation too hard for us; through JESUS CHRIST our LORD.

SERMON C.

BALAAAM'S THOUGHTS OF DEATH.

NUMBERS xxiii. 10.

“ Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.”

THIS is a thought, I verily believe, in which all the world would agree, if they would speak out their real feelings. Those who are most backward and unwilling to lead the life of the righteous man, even they, if it might be managed for them, would wish to die the righteous man's death.

And when I say the death of the righteous, I do not mean only such a death as naturally comes into men's minds, when a happy end is spoken of; when a man, after a well-spent life, comes to his grave (as Job expresses it) in a full age, like a shock of corn in his season; leaving a good name behind him, and affectionate friends to bewail his loss, and imitate his example; and, what is more a great deal, enjoying the comforts of a good conscience, and a Christian hope of everlasting life through the merits and intercession of our only SAVIOUR. I say, in speaking of the death of the righteous, which all men who think at all would be glad to die, I do not mean only such a happy deathbed as this, but any circumstances of death whatever, after an obedient and holy life. Suppose, for example, the very painfullest case of a person hindered by mortal disease from all use of his reason and memory, and haunted to the very last, by frightful images and fancies which he could not keep in order.

What if such were a man's portion, and he were to fall asleep, and wake in Paradise? as he would do, most assuredly, if he had before his sickness lived like a true believer in CHRIST JESUS. It would be much both for him and his friends to go through; but would he not be an infinite gainer in the end? when coming, by the mercy of his REDEEMER, into the region of secure and perfect peace, he would begin to understand, what here we can only guess at, how "these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out" for all such "an exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Nobody who thinks at all on the matter would hesitate to choose the death of the righteous, even under bitter circumstances like these, rather than the death of the unrighteous, though accompanied, as some bad men's deathbeds have been, not only with outward comforts of all sorts; but also, as they flattered themselves, with positive hopes of everlasting life.

The truth, however, seems to be, that in the generality of those cases, in which we may reasonably, and without presumption, hope, that we see the death of the righteous, neither perfect and entire calm and peace, nor violent distress and terror are found, but something somewhere between the two; leaving on serious and reverent minds a reasonable but pensive hope; a hope in God's mercy for our SAVIOUR's sake, that those whom we have lost out of our sight have entered for ever into His Rest. To cherish a stronger feeling than this—to be very positive about the condition of the dead—savours a little of irreligious presumption. It is much better to take the tone of the holy Church in our Burial Service. She takes not on herself to pass sentence either for or against any of the dead. Of the resurrection to eternal life, to be granted hereafter to all God's faithful people, through our LORD JESUS CHRIST, she expresses "a sure and certain hope;" but she is far indeed from teaching men to affirm, that the person who lies before them at any time will be for his part partaker in that happiness. All that the Church says tending that way, is contained in the following words: "We meekly beseech THEE, O FATHER, to raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness: that when we shall depart out of this life, we may rest in CHRIST, as our hope is this our brother doth;" appointed to be read at every Christian's grave. The words,

you see, are left on purpose very general. We do not say, sure and certain hope, as we do in speaking of the general resurrection of the dead ; we do not say, confident, nor even “ comfortable ” hope ; we only say, this is our hope ; which may be said by every one who does not absolutely despair of a thing. And who dares despair of a brother’s having repented, and finding mercy at last from GOD’S hand ? considering what a deep secret every man’s heart is to every other man in the world. We need not then be afraid, with our wise and kind mother, the Church, to “ hope ” more or less for every person whom she buries, that is, not to pass absolute sentence on them ; and to thank GOD, at any rate, that their sufferings and temptation in this life are over ; that HE has delivered them from the miseries of this sinful world. Thus much she charitably teaches us to say and feel concerning every one whom she commits to the grave ; but, with equal charity, she does not encourage us to *say* any thing more than this, although in our hearts we must of course experience much more lively hope in some cases than we do in others. But whether on any such occasion we judge rightly or no, GOD only can decide ; for HE only can read both our hearts and the hearts of the dead.

Thus much by the way, to guard men from supposing, that when they read of “ the death of the righteous ” in the text, or, in the Burial Service, of their hope of their brethren’s salvation, any thing peremptory and personal is meant. Neither the HOLY SPIRIT by the Prophet, nor the Church in her prayers, meant to encourage personal sentences and comparisons ; but their meaning was to make men earnestly desirous, each for himself, to die the death of the righteous, whether his death *appear* such to himself and others at the time or no.

Further, to understand the blessing of such a death, reflect for a moment what its opposite must be :—the death of an impenitent condemned sinner, given up for ever by his offended GOD. I will not here dwell on those frightful cases, in which despair seems to lay hold of obstinate sinners before the time ; nor will I suppose the case. (I fear, too common,) of one dying as he had lived, *sullenly* ; in a dull and irreligious hardness of heart ; but let us imagine one prosperously wicked and worldly, deceiving himself so as to die comfortably, with cheerful but erroneous hopes ; hopes not grounded on true faith in CHRIST, and sincere repentance for all

his sins. Such an one might seem to all human eyes most enviable in his death and life alike ; but think of him after death, and you see at once how it is ; you see that the worst death of those who are accounted righteous before God is infinitely better and more desirable than the best and easiest death to an unrighteous person. And thus you learn seriously to pray, not so much for comfort and hope *in* your death, as for that which, once obtained, never can fail nor forsake you : pardon, peace, and immortality *after* it.

This is so very reasonable, that those who most condemn themselves by it cannot help often speaking thus ; and thinking thus, too, when they do give themselves leisure to think at all on such subjects ; of which the prophet Balaam in the text is surely a very fearful instance. Nothing can exceed the apparent truth and piety of his thoughts concerning death ; wishing, as he did, thus passionately, that he might die the death of the righteous, and that his own last end might be like his. Was Balaam then true and pious in his heart ? Alas ! at this very time his heart was “ exercised with covetous practices ;” he was full of schemes to secure to himself at any risk the wages of unrighteousness. The history of his sin and self-deceit is this :—The enemies of God’s people earnestly desired to obtain his help against them, he being a prophet of God ; and they offered rewards which he could not resist ; they promised to promote him to great honour. He, greatly dazzled by these gifts, does not however consent all at once, but waits to inquire of the LORD about it ; hoping, no doubt, to obtain the permission they desired. But God in a vision positively forbade him. Yet, when the same request was urged on him again, he had not the wisdom and piety at once to decline it, as being a thing which he knew his MAKER could not bear ; but still said, “ Lodge here this night, and I will see what the LORD will say unto me.” Here we see too plainly how unchanged his heart was. The voice of God warned him distinctly, “ This is evil ; go not near it :” but he could not rest without contriving excuses to approach nearer and nearer to it. Then God in His anger gave him leave : “ Go with the men : but only say what I shall put into thy mouth.” And as he was on the way, HE warned him by that fearful miracle : “ the dumb ass, speaking with man’s voice, forbade the madness of

the prophet." Yet all this left the heart of this covetous person quite unchanged. Over and over he tried, by sacrifices, to prevail on the God of Israel to give up His people, and give him leave to curse them. And when he found it was all in vain, he did not indeed venture, in spite of God's SPIRIT, to pronounce a curse on them with his lips. In word, he faithfully delivered God's message, prophesying all manner of blessings to them ; but his heart all the while, or very soon after, was engaged in the vilest of all contrivances for their utter and complete ruin. Finding that he could not prevail on their God to cast them off capriciously, he endeavoured to prevail on them to cast off their God presumptuously ; and he succeeded but too well. He taught Balak to put a stumbling block before them, to persuade them to join in idol sacrifices, and to commit fornication ; and thus for a time brought a curse upon them, for thousands of them were cut off by pestilence.

Such was the mind and heart of the man who first uttered those affecting words, " Let me die the death of the righteous." He was for ever about the Devil's work ; doing all he could to corrupt souls, and make God and man enemies to each other, for the sake of a little filthy lucre. Yet, no doubt, even Balaam was for the time sincere in the wish, that he might at last be like those in his death whom he least resembled in his life. He meant what he said just then ; but when it came to matter of practice, he had no courage, no principle, to keep him up to his own good feelings. His words have passed into a kind of proverb, as describing a happy death : his own death was perhaps the most miserable of all that are recorded in the Old Testament.

Let no man, therefore, deceive himself, nor imagine that all is, as yet, tolerably right between him and his God, because he feels his heart warm at devout expressions like this of Balaam ; because when he thinks of it, he would wish to die the death of the righteous. You cannot have surer knowledge, more thorough conviction, than Balaam had, who was a prophet specially inspired by the HOLY GHOST ; who heard the words of God, and saw the vision of the ALMIGHTY ; to whom God, by especial revelation, showed the REDEEMER who was to come. You cannot well have more reason than he had to think yourself a particular favourite of God ; and certainly no such miracles have happened to you as

were vouchsafed to warn him of the error of his ways. However strong in faith you may seem to yourself, you cannot be more certain of the things of God than was this chosen messenger of God, when he heard the dumb ass reproving him with a man's voice, and when he saw the angel of the Lord with his sword drawn in his hand.

Do not then depend on your convictions ; do not think that all is right, because you are as yet right and undoubting with respect to the substance of what you believe. Such a faith as that may be the faith of Balaam, and will prove no better at last, except it be nourished by right practice.

Again : who would dare to trust their own temporary and passing feelings, however strong, and however good, when they read this wish of Balaam, and compare it with his conduct afterwards ? You cannot well have a stronger or livelier impression of any thing which God has done for you, or would have you do, than he had, when he uttered these words. You see what became of him : be not then high-minded and sanguine ; do not indulge flattering hopes on the strength of your being able, or rather feeling as if you were able, to enter into the spirit of moving words ; not though they be the words of the Holy Scripture. Do not rest satisfied with any thing at all, short of consistent Christian practice. Other ways may make you comfortable for a time, but this will bring a man peace at the last.

In what has been hitherto said, I have had respect principally to those who do know and feel something of religion, and are obliged to take some pains to quiet the misgivings of their consciences with regard to their duty to their SAVIOUR. But I fear there are a good many who are not even got so far as this, who do not yet *feel* at all (what however they must own in words) the greater blessedness of the death of the righteous. I fear there are many who never allow such thoughts to dwell at all on their minds, but get rid of them as fast as they can, because they interrupt their business or amusement. They will not meditate on the death of the righteous, because they will not meditate, if they can help it, on death in any shape at all ; their minds are so wedded to present things. It is too great an exertion for them, too much out of their way, to look forward to a time when this world will be absolutely nothing at all to them ; when eating and drink-

ing, sleeping and waking, working and resting, pleasure and gain, will be quite passed away for ever, and the only difference between men will be, whether they have been good Christians or no. Whatever they hear of that sort falls dead, as it were, upon their ears; they no more attend to it than as if it were uttered in a strange language. What is the consequence? Life goes on, and that evil hour which they will not think of, the hour of old age, of decay, and of death, draws silently and surely near them, and finds them at last unprepared. They go into the other world with their hearts as full of this as ever; with no sort of liking or longing for the true happiness, there only to be found, Communion with JESUS CHRIST in heaven. St. Paul has a few fearful words concerning certain unworthy Christians of his time, which seem but too suitable to the thoughtless ones of our time. "Their end," says he, "is destruction; their god is their belly, and their glory is in their shame;" for "they mind earthly things." One hardly knows how to reason with such men, or what awful circumstances of death and judgment to set before them with hope of prevailing; before whom all that Holy Scripture says has been set long ago, and they have paid no regard to it. But God's own example must be followed, who graciously perseveres, year after year, in renewing warnings long slighted, and calling those who refuse to listen. And the example of the Church must be followed, who is never tired of praying for persons to whom she has been offering, all their lives long, the means of grace and the hope of glory; and all their lives long they have slighted her offer; yet still she sends up her daily petitions to the FATHER of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, to bring into the way of truth all who have erred and are deceived, and take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of His word. Surely, if there are any who need the prayers of their brethren more than others, they are those unhappy and inconsiderate persons, who have been born and bred among Christians, and yet have never so much as thought how they might secure themselves the blessing of a truly Christian death.

They need our prayers; and they need also—(what is, by God's special grace, entirely in each man's own power,)—they have great need to receive from all Christians a good, a winning, and an engaging example; such as may show them, that the timely

remembrance of death and judgment, and of what will come after, instead of making life melancholy, is the way to the truest cheerfulness of heart; such a cheerfulness as will not pass away, like the vain flashes of mirth and enjoyment, on which the children of this world pride themselves; but will, as it were, settle down in men's hearts, and make them happier as they grow older, because they are so much the longer used to the fatherly care of their gracious God, and the healing and comfortable influences of steady and practical faith in His Holy Son. So that, whereas to the mere worldly man the prospect of old age is no better than growing darkness and dimness of anguish, to a faithful and obedient Christian, passing through old age to death, that is fulfilled which the Wise Man speaks; "The path of the just is a shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

SERMON CI.

ON THE DEATH OF A KING.

PREACHED JULY 9, 1837.

PSALM lxxxii. 6—8.

“ I have said, Ye are gods : and ye are all the children of the Most Highest. But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes. Arise, O God, and judge THOU the earth ; for THOU shalt take all heathen to thine inheritance.”

DEATH is the most awful of earthly things to all persons of all ranks ; but there is something in the death of a King peculiarly solemn and instructive to all who are willing to consider matters with the fear of God before their eyes. And if we suffer it to pass from us without improving it to holy purposes, undoubtedly it will be so much added to the sum of that heavy account, which we shall have to render very soon, of calls from Heaven slighted, and opportunities of amendment thrown away. And it seems peculiarly fitting to call your attention once more to this solemn subject : since, as most of you probably know, it was only last night that the remains of His late Majesty King William IV. were to be laid in the grave. Three weeks ago he was a crowned king, bearing the cumbrance, and the burthen, and the strife, of this great and turbulent people ; now he rests in that home whither his ancestors have departed before him, and to which we his subjects shall every one of us follow him before many years are over. Men, women, and children, throughout his dominions, those even who were farthest from His Majesty's person, and who knew and cared least about public affairs in general, have been

more or less thinking of him since the news of his great danger was made known ; their attention has been drawn that way by a kind of instinct, of which many would find it hard to give any account themselves.

And it is well that so it should be, provided the thoughts we have of our Sovereign's death be of the right sort, that is, of a religious sort ; provided we take occasion from this act of God's outstretched arm to pray earnestly that He would fix in our hearts a deep sense of the vanity of this world, and the eternity of the next ; of the heavy account we shall have to give, as of all other duties, so of what we owe to kings and princes ; and also of the duty and the wisdom of trusting God in all things, little and great, and of always being on the Church's side, since we know not what shall be on the morrow, only we are quite sure that He will order matters, so that in the end the kingdom of His Son, that kingdom of which earthly governments are parts and shadows, is sure to prevail against all opposition for ever. If we thus consider the death of our King, it is well ; but it is not well, if we regard it as matter of mere curiosity, wondering what will come next ; which is a way of thinking natural enough to most men, and likely to become more and more common among us, as it becomes easier to know what men are doing everywhere. You may, perhaps, think it a mere trifle, a matter of no consequence for good or for evil, whether one is fond of hearing news or no. But hear what was said five hundred years ago by one of the best and wisest teachers of holiness whom the Church has seen since the Apostles' days. " He that desires much to hear news, is never void of passions, and secular desires, and adherences to the world." It is a bad sign, therefore, when people listen eagerly to the accounts of our King's sickness, death, and funeral, merely as to something new, and there an end. To say no more of it, it is disrespectful treatment of the sad and serious dispensations of ALMIGHTY GOD ; it is the same kind of thing as reading the Bible with the notion that you are reading a book of history, a report of what happened to the Jews.

It is still worse, if any man look on the death of his King as a matter of mere gain or loss to himself or his friends, or to this or that party in the state. For so it is, unhappily, that this kingdom of England is so divided into parties, that every thing almost

which happens in it, and much more so important an affair as the death of the Sovereign, is sure to be considered by many persons just as it may happen to affect the interest of themselves or their party for the moment. We of this congregation happily are most of us too far from the tumult of public life to be much, or immediately, in the way of this temptation; yet there are probably not a few here, who understand, and more or less care about, the manner in which the death of a King of England may possibly affect the course of the government; and to these I would wish to say, "Take heed that you do not let your thoughts dwell only on calculations of this sort; if you do not mind, they will take off your attention from the warning which such an event conveys to all men; you will think too much of what men are doing, and too little of God's overruling Providence."

This that I have last mentioned is the error of persons who enter more or less into what are called politics; but I should not wonder if there were some, among the poor more especially, who look on the death of their King with a sort of proud indifference, as if it were, to them at least, no more than the death of another man. They may perhaps be tempted by the spirit of discontent to say to themselves, "I am a poor man, just, or hardly able to get my bread by hard labour: what are kings and great men, living or dead, to such an one as I?" Thus some may speak; but I would beseech them to consider whether this their feeling is any better than a sullen repining spirit, which would cause them in like manner to be unkind and envious towards all who are richer or greater or more fortunate than themselves. I would have them reflect whether they are not going on much in the same spirit as Judas Iscariot was, when he grumbled at so much being laid out in what he thought mere barren honour to his Master. "Why was this waste of the ointment made?" sounds not very unlike what some persons now-a-days think the perfection of wisdom and common sense. "A King, after all," they say, "is but a man, and why should so much more be made of him, living or dead, than of another person?"

In opposition to all these errors, hear how the holy Book of God teaches us to meditate on the death of our Sovereign Lord the King. The substance of its teaching on such an occasion is briefly comprehended in the short but high and mysterious Psalm

from which the text is taken. We are there taught that the ever present God is present in a peculiar manner among princes and other chief rulers of the world ; that HE expostulates with them against the oppression and injustice of which they are tempted to be guilty ; by the checks of conscience, and by His written Word, and by the warnings of His Church and ministers, HE is continually saying to them, “ How long will ye give wrong judgment, and accept the persons of the ungodly ? Defend the poor and fatherless ; see that such as are in need and necessity have right.” This is, in short, the history of the Church, how she has in all ages lifted up her voice against whatever oppression and injustice the strong ones of the world have practised upon the weaker. And it is because the world has refused to hear these warnings, that things have gone on so disorderly as we read of and experience. The world will not be taught by the Church, will not understand her meaning, nor listen to her voice ; therefore, and for no other reason, “ all the foundations of the earth are out of course.”

Well, so far the Divine Psalmist teaches the great men of the world their duty. But in the next verse, according to the impartiality of Scripture, which excepts no man’s person, but warns rich and poor alike, he goes on to show what we should think of these princes, even though they should oppress us ; and how we should look upon their deaths. “ I have said, Ye are gods : and ye are all the children of the MOST HIGHEST.” Our SAVIOUR Himself observed once to the Jews, as a remarkable thing, that the HOLY SPIRIT “ called them gods to whom this word of God came ;” that is, the kings and princes of the earth, however unworthy, are, in right of their office, a kind of gods ; that is, in God’s stead, to their subjects. As such, God looks on them with peculiar care, counts them His children in an especial manner. “ Ye are all,” saith HE, “ the children of the MOST HIGHEST : but ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes.” “ Yet,” HE adds, in order to make them understand that they too had an account to give, “ yet ye too shall die like men, and fall like any one of the princes beside and before you.” And the Prophet himself, carried away by his deep thoughts on this awful manner of communing between the ALMIGHTY and his chosen deputies, the kings of the kingdoms of

the earth,—the Prophet utters a kind of response, and let every creature join with him: “Arise, O God, and judge THOU the earth; for THOU shalt take all heathen to thine inheritance.” Which is a prayer to the same effect as when the souls of the Martyrs under the altar cry to GOD in the book of Revelation, to avenge their blood on their persecutors; or, as when we ourselves, taught by our LORD, pray daily, “Thy kingdom come.”

I think it will appear, from a few observations I shall now offer in conclusion, that the end of this Psalm does in a remarkable way point out the chief purposes of GOD’s providence in such a dispensation as the death of a Christian King. First, a man must be cold hearted indeed, not to feel in such an event the touch of an Almighty hand, awakening him to consider the utter vanity and worthlessness of this life, considered in itself. Can we help saying to ourselves with the son of Sirach, “He who is to-day a king, to-morrow shall die? And when a man is dead,” king and subject alike, “he shall inherit creeping things, beasts, and worms.” The sentence of decay, as well as death, passes alike impartially on all. Who can think seriously on this, and not be ashamed of having set his heart on such trifling transitory things as the honours, riches, satisfactions of this world? The bells that were tolling yesterday evening in so many churches all over the country, did they not say to every Englishman, as plainly as if an angel from Heaven had said it, Why will you set your heart on things which will not endure? Do you not, one and all, see what the best of this world must come to, and that very soon? Think how short a time it is, not quite seven years, since we were mourning in the same way for a former king; think, thus it is with the best and highest of the things which people seek on this side the grave; we have them not at all for our own, but for a very short and uncertain lease; but in the other world GOD has given us, if we would but lay hold of it, a kingdom and a crown which will endure for ever; has given us, I say, for so the Scripture speaks: CHRIST “*hath made us kings to GOD and His FATHER.*” He has given us power to rule ourselves here, by the help of His HOLY SPIRIT, in such a manner that we may secure, without fail, a crown and a kingdom, where all things are eternal. This spiritual aid GOD sealed to us in Holy Baptism; and the death of our King is one among many warnings, whereby He would hinder us

from throwing it away. It is as if HE spake aloud, " Behold, what comes of the greatest and highest in this world, even when innocently obtained, and blamelessly (as far as we see) enjoyed ; full of care while it lasts, gone in a moment, and never to return."

And will you not rather think on that world, which " they who are counted worthy to obtain shall never die any more, but shall be equal to the angels, and shall be children of God, being the children of the Resurrection?" When you see that he who was the highest amongst us has found One yet higher than himself ; he who could not be called to account on earth is gone to give an account in the unseen world, and to be judged by the same rule as the meanest of his Christian subjects ; will you not at such an hour look forward to your own last trial, and wish, and pray, and resolve to endeavour that you may not be found unprepared?

But, secondly : although the sight of a king's death is naturally apt to make us all have sad thoughts of our common mortality, yet the Scripture warns us that we think not rudely on it, as if it proved kings, while they lived, to be no more than other men. You perceive, that in this same place where kings are warned that they shall " die like men ;" they are nevertheless called gods, and are said to be all of them " the children of the Most HIGHEST." Wherefore the death of one sovereign, and succession of another, may well cause us to have serious thoughts of the high and sacred office of our King ; and to remember that he is not, as some imagine, (a strange imagination surely for Christians,) set over the people by their own choice, so as to be only or chiefly their minister ; but he is, as St. Paul says, " the minister of God ;" a minister in somewhat of the same sense as bishops and priests are ministers. He is called our *Lord* the King, our *gracious* Sovereign ; his subjects bow the knee before him, when specially called into his presence ; and to him all persons in the kingdom are to look as the fountain of judgment, justice, and mercy ; the Defender of the Faith, the protector of the good, and the punisher of wrong doers. These are so many instances of something like Divine honour being paid to Christian kings, and may serve to explain the remarkable expression : " I have said, Ye are gods." As Moses taking God's message, was said himself to be a god to Pharaoh, so kings are called gods, as being in CHRIST's place on earth. For JESUS CHRIST, the Word Incarnate, set down on

HIS FATHER's right hand, is, as we know, "the Prince of the kings of the earth, King of kings, and Lord of lords." These are among His own chosen titles, as you may read in the Book of Revelation. But the several kings are CHRIST's deputies, trusted with a part of His power in the several countries; and standing, as they do, in His stead, must be honoured with a religious and sacred honour, as all things ought that especially pertain to HIM. To remind persons of this, it has ever been the custom of God's Church, before our LORD's coming, as well as after, to anoint the sovereign with holy oil, as we read that David and Saul were anointed. For the same reason the crown is put on his Majesty's head, not by a great nobleman, but by a Bishop of the Church of God; and he is sworn on the Bible to those duties especially, in which he most nearly represents JESUS CHRIST glorified, namely, to the protection of the Church, and the administration of judgment with mercy.

All these customs Christian kingdoms have received, in order that both kings and people might be duly reminded, how very sacred is the royal office, how nearly it approaches to that of an ordained minister, how deeply we are all bound to venerate our Sovereign, as holding a leading office in the Church of God, being CHRIST's chief minister there in one way, as Bishops are in another way; deputed by God's own commission to be nursing fathers to the children of the Church, as Bishops and Priests are spiritual fathers of the same. Regarding the King thus as a head-servant in the Church, we see with how much force and reason the two commands are joined together by St. Peter, "Fear God, honour the King."

Thirdly, we learn to have due thoughts of the great anxiety of His Majesty's office, and the especial dangers, spiritual and temporal, which must needs wait upon so high a trust in this bad and unquiet world. "Ye shall fall," says the sacred text, "like one of the princes;" evidently meaning that princes, as such, were in more than common danger of falling; their life, as it were, hung by a thread, so many and so restless were their enemies, and so wearisome their heavy duties. This was still more evidently the case in unsettled countries, and in the time when the Psalms were written; as every one must know who has looked

into the history of the kings of Israel, in the books of Kings and Chronicles ; where sometimes in one chapter, and in the course of a very few years, we find five or six sovereigns succeeding each other, and perishing by violence. The expression, therefore, “ Ye shall fall like one of the princes,” probably means, “ Great as you may now seem, you are subject to the same casualties and dangers as the other princes before you ;” and you will do well to remember this your condition, that you may not be lifted up, nor forget God.

In our time, and in our part of the world, the personal danger of a sovereign may be much diminished ; though many who now live may remember a King of France murdered publicly by his own subjects ; a sad proof that good and great kings are not yet exempt from violent deaths. But however, the anxiety and trouble of a true Christian monarch, a dutiful son and daughter of the Church, called to rule a nation like this, must indeed be something overpowering, something intolerable, were it not for Divine support. Our young Queen, whom God preserve, has acknowledged that she so feels it ; her own royal words are, “ I should feel myself utterly oppressed by the burthen, were I not sustained by the hope that Divine Providence, which has called me to the work, will give me strength for the performance of it.” And it is said, I know not how truly, but certainly it seems very reasonable to believe, that she was in the greatest distress for many days, when she first knew that she was likely to be called to the crown immediately. Now of this, two good uses may be made by every one of Her Majesty’s subjects :—First, That we remember to join most earnestly in the prayers which the Church daily offers up for her, join in them heartily, for Charity’s sake, as we should if any person in great affliction desired the prayers of the congregation : Secondly, That we learn to be more and more contented with our own lowly condition, as many of us as are tempted sometimes to consider themselves too low in the world. For here we see that the highest and noblest condition is, in many respects, even more exposed to fears and cares than the lowest.

Fourthly, we shall do well to add to these thoughts a humble and thankful remembrance of God’s mercy in giving us an

undoubted heir to the throne, so that when His Majesty King William died, there could be no question who should come to be obeyed in his room. And thus, as in the Church it is undoubted who are our governors, since we know none can be so, but such as receive their commission from the Apostles by laying on of the Bishops' hands, so in the State we are at no loss to know whom God has made His chief minister; the royal line in the one case answering, as it were, to the apostolical line in the other. And this may carry on our thoughts further, to the consideration of one great end which in common belongs to both the Kingly and the Episcopal office, namely, to be in CHRIST's stead, carrying on His government here on earth, and preparing the way for His heavenly kingdom. His special Providence, in furnishing us so far with a sure and unquestionable succession in both these lines, may be to us a pledge of the sure continuance and final triumph of His Church. His holy Arm is so far revealed in sight of the nations of the earth; they see it held out to support His own building, and carry on His own work; and the faith of good men is strengthened to look on more and more steadily to the end. To such meditations the Holy Scripture leads us, by what occurs at the end of the Psalm concerning the final end of earthly sovereignty. "Arise, O GOD, and judge THOU the earth; for THOU shalt take all heathen to Thine inheritance."

And surely, while we are acknowledging God's fatherly providence, in giving us princes to continue a Christian kingdom among us, even as HE gives us Bishops to continue His Church, we can hardly help asking ourselves with all seriousness, How have we deserved such merciful care? How have we prayed for our King? how have we revered, how have we obeyed him in times past? Have not our prayers been too often careless, our thoughts hard and irreverent, our obedience to the laws for wrath only, and not for conscience sake? Certainly, if God be so gracious to us as to continue the blessings of His Church and the monarchy among us, we cannot say that it is for want of provocation on our part to take them away; we must own that it is all of His free and unspeakable mercy. Considering the many sins of our land, and our own part in them, we have need to bow the knees of our hearts, and prepare ourselves for the worst that may happen to

ourselves and our country ; humbly submitting to what we cannot help, and when we have a choice, faithfully endeavouring to serve our Queen and our God ; and the more unsettled we find things on earth, the more stedfastly endeavouring to fix our hearts and our hopes on Heaven, where only true peace can be found, and on the Church, which is the appointed way to Heaven.

SERMON CII.

ST. PAUL AT ATHENS.

Acts xvii. 32—34.

“And when they heard of the Resurrection of the dead, some mocked; and others said, ‘We will hear thee again of this matter.’ So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit, certain clave unto him, and believed.”

AMONG other good and gracious purposes, for which the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD seems to have provided the Acts of the Apostles, one is, To hinder men from expecting too much from the Gospel, though it be preached never so faithfully: and also to warn them of those evil tempers, which are most likely to hinder them from receiving it worthily. All things considered, that Sacred History represents to us the hearers of the Apostles themselves behaving much in the same sort of way as people do now in the like circumstances. “Some believed the things that were spoken, and some believed not.” Some “spake against them, contradicting and blaspheming:” but the greater part, it should seem, like Gallio, “cared for none of these things,” any more than just to satisfy their curiosity. Not even the miraculous gifts, and holy lives, and willing martyrdom, of such men as St. Stephen and St. Paul, could prevail, in all or most instances, against the pride and corruption of man. Recollecting what very great numbers continued even then in unbelief, we cannot, I think, well say, that the Christian Faith, supported as it was by the visible aid of the HOLY GHOST, met with a better reception than now.

Of this, there cannot be a more striking example, than what happened to St. Paul, the most learned and perhaps the most industrious of the Apostles, in Athens, a city which at that time was reckoned, as it had been reckoned for ages before, in wisdom and learning, the first in the world.

It does not appear that he wrought any miracles there. We may suppose that the ALMIGHTY rather chose to leave that people to judge according to their own common sense, and according to the enquiries which they might easily make, whether what he said was true: thus putting them fairly on their trial in respect of that judgment and reason, on which they were used to pride themselves so much. If they would but employ their thoughts half as attentively on the lessons which St. Paul taught, as they were accustomed to employ them on mere curious questions, such as their wise men delighted in, there would be no need of mighty works, signs, and wonders, to make them believe. Or if, having attended, they still refused to be Christians; "neither would they believe, though one rose from the dead."

And whereas one great use of miracles wrought by the Messengers of CHRIST was to draw men's attention to the Truth: the Athenians needed this less than others, because, as St. Luke here tells us, the whole city, "and the strangers which were there, spent their time in nothing else, but either to see or hear some new thing." Curiosity, a passion for news, took up their minds more than any thing. How then could they help attending to Lessons so thoroughly new and wonderful as St. Paul was now bringing among them? One true, eternal GOD, Maker and Governor of all men and all things; His favour, the only happiness; Faith in CHRIST crucified, and true Repentance, the only way to be favoured by HIM; the end of all, everlasting Life or Death, to to be adjudged by the same JESUS CHRIST according to men's behaviour here:—what could be newer, or more unheard of, than this, to a people struggling in heathen darkness, perplexed with philosophy and vain deceit? Whatever they might find to say against it, at least they could not deny that it was *new*. And as such, the Evangelist tells us, they really did pay attention to it. They brought St. Paul before that council, to which, in their city, it properly belonged to consider and judge of new opinions; and said, "May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou

speakest, is : for thou bringest certain strange things to our ears : we would know, therefore, what these things mean." In answer to which, he first put them in mind, that they themselves had an altar in their city, consecrated "To God, who is unknown ;" thus acknowledging their own ignorance :—that they also considered themselves to be God's offspring, thereby condemning the ordinary folly of fancying the Godhead to dwell in things of "gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art or man's device:" and then he showed them how what he taught agreed with this "natural Religion" of theirs ; namely, That there is one God, who made all the nations of the earth and ordered them by His Providence, if so be they would seek HIM : in Whom we live, and move, and have our being : Who although in former times HE had winked, as it were, at men's ignorant idolatries, "now commandeth all men every where to repent : because HE hath appointed a day, wherein HE will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom HE hath ordained : whereof HE hath given assurance unto all men, in that HE hath raised HIM from the dead." Thus skilfully did the great Apostle make the most of those fragments of Truth, which the Athenians already acknowledged ; yet boldly rebuking their heathenish follies : and ended with enforcing that awful doctrine, which most concerned them and all men, the eternal judgment of mankind by CHRIST JESUS, made sure by His Resurrection from the Dead.

Now, how were these new and strange, these most awakening and important truths, received among those lovers of novelty, and seekers, as they professed to be, of deep truths, as yet unknown ? The Text tells us, and it is worth our most serious consideration : "When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked ; and others said, 'We will hear thee again of this matter.' So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit, certain clave unto him, and believed." There were, it seems, three kinds of listeners among them. "Some mocked ;" for want of any thing better to say, they turned those divine instructions, on which the life of their souls depended, into a matter of contempt and ridicule. Others said, "We will hear thee again : " their consciences told them there was a good deal in it, but they had not yet courage to make up their minds to become Christians altogether. They quieted themselves as they might for the present,

much as Felix did afterwards, when he said to the same St. Paul, "Go thy way for this time: when I have a convenient season, I will send for thee." Lastly, a few sincere ones there were, who not only listened to what was said, but fairly gave themselves up to it, not only with their lips, but in their lives. They "clave unto him, and believed." But out of that great and learned city, as far as St. Luke gives us to understand, these last and best were few indeed; very few, compared with the numbers who became Christians in other places, which St. Paul visited about the same time.

Surely, one cannot think on these things, without perceiving, first of all, the great dangerousness of indulging such tempers, as those Athenians had been trained up in: love of what is new, and conceit of themselves, as being wiser and more knowing than others. "All the Athenians and strangers which were there, had spent their time in nothing else, but to see or to hear some new thing." What is the consequence? An Apostle comes among them, and preaches through JESUS the Resurrection from the dead: and when they hear him, some mock him, and others say, they will hear him again. Can words speak more plainly, to warn men that the love of hearing new things is but a very ill preparation for receiving Christian instruction as one ought? The matter is this: Christian instruction is a grave, sober, practical thing. It lies within a small compass, a very few plain truths, the truths contained in the Apostles' Creed, the LORD'S Prayer, and the Ten Commandments. To meditate on these over and over, will soon become a wearisome thing, if not accompanied and followed with an honest, and hearty, and constant endeavour to obtain God's grace, and *live* accordingly. But in such quiet and serious endeavours there is nothing engaging or striking enough, to a mind that is set on novelty and amusement. It seems like the same well-known story, coming over and over again: and people too soon persuade themselves, that they understand it already, and need not regard it. Which notion once encouraged is an effectual bar to stop men's minds, against the teaching not only of St. Paul, but of our Blessed SAVIOUR Himself.

Be warned, then, once for all, against this childish love of novelty: which, if indulged, is sure to make you tired, before

long, of God's presence and teaching. Be warned also of this certain truth : that the only way not to be overcome by such wearisome, irreligious feelings,—the only way to make divine truth ever fresh and interesting to you,—is to *practise* what you hear ; to try and suit your *behaviour* to it, in all circumstances and varieties of life. The old truths will thus become better understood, and continually appear in something of a new light, as they are continually applied to the new occasions, which life, from day to day, will bring forth. But the same truths merely talked of and thought on, without being diligently put into practice, will soon become, what I fear many people find them, a tedious tale, which they are glad to have done with.

Again ; this part of St. Paul's history appears to warn us, no less earnestly, against the pride of wisdom and knowledge. Those Athenians considered themselves as by far the most sensible people in the world, and the best instructed in useful truths ; and, in many respects, so they were : and yet, when the true wisdom came among them, you have heard how they received it ; either they ridiculed it, or they put it off for the present. Who, after such an example, would not be afraid to value himself for being in any respect more knowing or more ingenious than some of his neighbours ? Alas ! you had better be quite senseless, than take such delight in your knowledge or skill, as to turn away from the Cross of CHRIST, and despise or neglect eternal things.

But now, if the eager love of novelty, and the conceit of useful knowledge, are tempers very dangerous to be encouraged, tending to make people more or less ashamed of CHRIST, and weary of the Gospel, surely the men of this age and country are in very great danger ; since there never was a time nor a people, as far as we know, since the world began, more abounding in new things, or more eagerly set upon them. There never was a time nor a people, among whom the conceit of knowledge and understanding, on every subject, had more to encourage it.

Accordingly, it is found every day that the plain truths of the Creed and the Catechism, such truths as St. Paul would have taught the Athenians, are presented in vain to men's eyes and ears. They are so taken up with looking and listening after something quite new ; so delighted with their own skill in contriving something for which they expect to be admired, or at least

in finding fault with former contrivances, that they will not pay any attention to the message sent them by their SAVIOUR from Heaven. Above all things, they stop their ears against the doctrine of a judgment to come. "It is the old story," they say; "we know it all beforehand:" and they turn their minds, as quick as they can, to something or other which they love better to think on.

And in this conduct, so like the Athenians, men differ, as *they* did, among one another; some of them meeting the warnings of the ALMIGHTY with open profane scorn and ridicule; others putting them off for the present with such excuses as they may. Some "mock the LORD;" others say, "We will hear thee again of this matter." Thus, when drunkenness or wantonness is reprov'd; when the Scripture woes are denounced against them who are "mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink;" or when the grave caution of the Apostle is repeated, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth;" those who are most concerned are too apt to put the rebuke off lightly, as if it were a fair matter of jesting. And yet it was the wisest of all mankind, speaking by the SPIRIT of GOD, who said, "Fools (only) make a mock at sin." And our gracious and indulgent SAVIOUR Himself pronounced a woe on those who laugh now, on those who are thus incurably light-minded: "Woe unto such; for they shall mourn and weep."

If, notwithstanding such fearful admonitions, sensual transgressors, drunkards and wantons, will go on mocking when they are reprov'd, no wonder if those do so whose sins are more directly against their MAKER; those who are avowedly irreligious and profane. And this, be it observed, is the temper to which wild and sensual courses, long indulged in spite of warning, are sure to bring a man at last. So are greedy and crafty habits: the way and mind of those who are determined, whatever it may cost their souls, to go all lengths with the world; to take all gainful liberties which they see their neighbours taking. Such persons, I say, no less than the sensual, are "hardening their necks" against reproof: the longer they go on in their covetousness, the more sullenly and scornfully will they hear, when God speaks to them of a judgment to come. Surely we cannot be too jealous of the first beginning of those evil tempers, the end of which is

hardness of heart, mockery and contempt of God's Word and Commandment. We cannot be too earnest or too constant in applying to God for grace, to take His fatherly reproofs *seriously*.

But there were some among St. Paul's hearers who did not indeed directly scorn him, yet were little the better for his sermon, because they allowed themselves to *put off* considering it. They said, "We will hear thee again of this matter." See here a true account, how it happens that so many Christians, not positively wicked and profligate, hear instruction week after week, and year after year, to so little profit. They want resolution and courage to do things, even when clearly convinced that it is their duty, and their straight and only way to be happy. I believe it is thus, not unfrequently, with those who are so unfortunate as to have got into a habit of talking profanely, mixing their conversation with oaths and curses. Again and again they resolve to amend, but have not the heart to set about it *directly* : to begin watching their words *at once*. So with respect to sottish and intemperate people ; they do not become quite reckless at once : often and often they have misgivings, after their bad habit is formed, and when they hear the threatenings of God, the dreadful account they must one day give, of time, and substance, and health thrown away ; of friends made miserable and a soul corrupted ; when they think of these things, and what it will be to be turned out of Heaven for not overcoming a vile brutish custom, they cannot be quite contented with themselves : they wish they were better men, and mean to be so *some time or other* ; but they want Christian courage and self-denial to resist the *very neat* temptation : *this once more*, they say to themselves, they surely may and will venture ; but they fully intend one day to "hear the Bible again on this matter ;" they mean to be temperate and sober at last.

It is the same, more especially, in sins of omission ; leaving undone what ought to be done. A selfish, covetous man, suppose, hears or reads of our Blessed SAVIOUR, how HE went about doing good, and resolves to live less for himself, and more for other people's good ; but the resolution comes to nothing, because he waits to "consider more of it," instead of boldly putting it in practice. Another, who has lived in unkindness or in envy, is startled at finding what *entire* forgiveness the JUDGE of the world requires of him, and determines that he will one day be *quite* on

good terms with those whom he has quarrelled with : but he cannot bring himself to it as yet ; he knows well enough it would be right, but he will hear a few sermons and chapters more, a few more reproofs from our SAVIOUR, before he will put his charity in *practice*. And how stands the case in devotional duties ? You have allowed yourself perhaps to be inattentive to your prayers ; perhaps too easily to omit them altogether ; or, having leisure and being able, you have not exercised yourself in devout reading ; you have taken no pains to know, and to like, the pious writings of holy men. Or, again, having been invited, over and over, to the Holy Communion, and having fully made up your mind concerning the duty and necessity of remembering our LORD in His own appointed way, still you go on, month after month, and God sees you not at His Table. His Providence, one way or another, puts you seriously in mind of your fault in these respects, or in others like them. You wish it were otherwise ; it makes you uneasy. That wish, that uneasiness, is God's special grace towards you. Take care what you do ; take care that you be not chargeable with receiving such grace in vain. Take care of the thought, " Another time ; " " To-morrow, or the next day, will be soon enough ; " but endeavour, by God's help, the very next opportunity, to be the better for the check HE has given you. If your fault lie in your prayers, this very night strive to pray better. If you have been negligent of holy reading, set yourself a time for it this very day. If you have been careless of the Holy Communion, before night begin preparing for it in earnest ; and till you have fairly made that effort, let your difficulties and scruples (if you have any) alone.

After these plain instances, you cannot, I think, fail to understand the danger of saying, " I will think more of it," instead of doing what is right, and what will please our SAVIOUR, at once. That danger is plainly enough hinted by St. Luke's relation in the text. Some mocked ; some said, " We will hear thee again of this matter ; and so Paul departed from among them." Beware, lest while you are waiting and considering, or, still worse, while you are hardening your heart, the means of grace be taken away from you. Be sure of it, every hour of delay lessens your chance of final amendment.

Finally, as at Athens, so (one may hope) every where, a few

at least may be seen, whose daily life and conduct shew that they cleave to CHRIST and believe. Let not their good example be thrown away and lost upon you. They shew you, at least, what you may do, if you will: they shew you, in an age too fond of new things, too proud of knowledge and wisdom, how much better and happier it is to do right than to know all things. "Stand ye in *their* ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls."

S E R M O N CIII.

LIFE AND DEATH IS IN THE TONGUE.

ST. MATT. xii. 37.

“ By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.”

WHAT is sooner past and gone, or more easily done, than speaking a word? It is out of the lips in a moment, and in another moment the sound of it is over; it passes into the air, and no trace remains of it. Yet how much, even in matters of this life, may depend on one little word! Life or death, poverty or riches, reproach or good fame, health or sickness, sorrow or joy, may be the result of a very few syllables. It may make all the difference to us in life: and not to us only, but to all, be they ever so many, who depend on us. A king, for example, gives the word, and it determines whether there shall be war or peace, perhaps half the world over, for many years. In that crowd of Jews who were assembled round Pilate's judgment-seat, there might very likely be some one person, whose voice might determine the rest, whether they should cry, Crucify Him, or no. Think what unspeakable things hung upon that voice, upon that one word! yet it took no unusual time to speak; it was out of the lips as soon as any common word, and as impossible to recall, when it was once spoken.

I have mentioned an awful example indeed; but let each one of us only reflect on the turning points of his own life, so far as it has hitherto passed. Surely we shall see more and more

reason, the more we consult our memories, to admire the wonderful power of words, and to believe that as they are well or ill ordered, all things will go right or wrong.

By this we may a little understand how in eternal things also very much may depend upon our words : how on the one hand the tongue may be, as the Psalms teach us more than once, the best member that we have ; and that “ if any man offend not in word,” the same must surely be, as St. James says, “ a perfect man, and able to bridle the whole body :” and how, on the other hand, ill ordered and indulged, the tongue may be “ an unruly member, such as no man can tame, full of deadly poison ;” or, as he calls it again, “ a fire ; a world of iniquity, defiling the whole body, setting on fire the course of nature, and itself set on fire of hell.” Surely we ought to think more than we do of the importance of our words ; we ought to watch and restrain what we say more carefully, when we know that Holy Scripture contains such warnings as these.

But we shall judge more truly of our duty in this respect, and feel our danger more completely, if we try to consider a little more distinctly the number and kind of duties which depend immediately on the tongue, and can only be performed by it ; the way in which words bind us to every other part of our duty, and of God’s will ; and the great positive sins which we are in danger of continually committing.

We are to recollect, first of all, that the tongue or gift of speech is a great and wonderful part of that awful Image of God, in which we were at first created, and which, sad as our downfall has been, is not yet quite blotted out by our sins and the sins of our forefathers. As God has His Word, His own living and personal Word, one with Himself, even His Son, begotten from everlasting of HIM, by whom HE manifests and declares Himself to all His servants, Angels and men ; so HE has given us the power of manifesting ourselves to others, and communicating, so to speak, our own thoughts and our own selves to them, by the gift of words and of speech. This part of our nature then, being a part of God’s Image and Likeness in us, must of course bring with it many deep and serious duties. It must be an unspeakable talent, which we have to answer for. If we do not employ it as we ought, the error cannot be a light or trifling

one; since it is profaning a gift by which God has already brought us near HIM, and has given us the power and the hope to draw nearer and nearer through all eternity.

Reflect only, for example, how much is contained in these three duties: To speak the truth, to praise God, to use words of kindness to one another; yet these are all duties of the tongue, only or chiefly. First and foremost of them all, of course, comes this: to speak the truth. The Church teaches us in one of her Collects to pray, that we may constantly do so: and I suppose many of us must have sometimes been struck by that prayer, and have thought how simple and easy a rule it sounds in itself, and how shameful to us, that we have not kept it better in times past. Of course, I say, Truth is the root and ground of all duties of speech, because the very purpose and end for which speech has been bestowed upon us by Almighty God is to represent things as they are; to bear witness to God's *truth*; to tell other persons *truly* what they ought to think, and how to feel. Therefore, whoever swerves from the truth goes against the very purpose and end of speech: it is impossible that any of such a man's words should please ALMIGHTY GOD. And, on the other hand, God is Truth; and whenever we speak the truth, though it be in a small matter, we are so far like God, and at an unspeakable distance we follow one at least of His glorious perfections.

Then it may do us good to recollect how entirely all the other good qualities of our discourse are lost, when it is known to be without this one, of entire truth: we may praise God in the best possible words, His own words in the Holy Psalms and Hymns of the Church: we may speak in the kindest and most charitable way to our neighbours; but if it be any how known that truth is not at the bottom of what we say, all men presently feel that it is worse than nothing. It is like a lamp put out: all its light, and warmth, and meaning, is at once done away, though in outward form it continue just the same. We all of us feel this in some instances; as in that which the Apostle St. James so clearly sets before us: "If a brother or sister be naked, or destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto him, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled, notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful for the body: what doth it profit?" The words which are most precious and encouraging to the afflicted, and

make the speaker most amiable, if they be true, and come from the heart,—are felt at once to be mere mockery, and hateful instead of lovely, when they turn out to be mere words. Men feel this most in their doings and sayings with one another; but as the Apostle there points out, it is just the same in our doings and sayings with God. As kind words without kind actions are unprofitable, so faith, and praise, and confession, and all religious words, without works of obedience, are dead, being alone. Every one sees this, in a general way; but when it comes to the comparison of our own words with our own deeds, not in respect of one another, but in respect of our God, then we do not so plainly discern the foolishness and guilt of it; because it is almost or altogether a matter out of sight: and so he that speaks not the truth to his God whom he hath not seen, thinks less of it, than if he speak not the truth to his brother whom he hath seen. Yet all of us, surely, when we do come to think of it, understand that if we speak false to our MAKER, our words can do us no good: nay, in such a case the best words do us in a manner most harm. For the nearer the words seem to bring us to HIM, the more profane and wicked is it, not even to try to mean what we say.

But supposing us really to speak the truth, then, indeed, high and glorious is the thought of a creature praising its CREATOR, a soul forgiven and justified praising its SAVIOUR. For this is offering up not what we have but what we are, our very inward selves, to be a sacrifice of thanksgiving. It is answering, as we best may, to the goodness, and holiness, and glory of HIM, who both blesses us, and gives us power to thank HIM for the blessing. It is the employment of Angels and glorified Spirits in heaven: they rest not day and night, praising HIM who is thrice holy. It is the employment of saints on earth, the Church's employment when she draws nearest to her God. Then it is that she teaches us to say, We praise THEE, we bless THEE, we worship THEE, we glorify THEE, we give thanks to THEE, for THY great glory. And all this is the work of the tongue. No wonder that God's most favoured servants have ever rejoiced to cry out with David, "My heart is ready, my heart is ready, I will sing and give praise with the best member that I have."

And as the Truth pours such a glorious light on what even frail

imperfect men say in the way of praising God, so is it the very charm and heavenly bond which makes our intercourse and conversation a true blessing. There is no need to say much of this, because God has made us such, that we cannot help feeling it at once. To have kind, and good, and helpful words spoken to us, and to be quite sure that they are meant, and that there is no fear of their ever ceasing or changing ;—this is no small part of what we expect of the happiness of Heaven : and this is what we feel in part, in some very faint, and low, and humble measure, when we are among kindred and friends whom we know we can trust, and whom God's overflowing mercy permits us, as now and then it uses, to forget our own undeserving so far, as to have for a time full enjoyment of ourselves and of one another—a kind of earnest of the Communion of Saints.

Whoever will consider these things, will be able, perhaps, the better to understand some part of our Blessed LORD's meaning, when HE said, " By thy words thou shalt be justified." And surely, what we hear every day, and too often what we speak, is enough to make us feel deeply the fearfulness of the other saying which HE added, " By thy words thou shalt be condemned." The multitude of falsehoods which are told in business, or by persons under authority to those set over them, or by those who have any how done wrong, and are afraid of being found out and punished : how great, think you, will be the quantity of sin which all these heaped together will be found to amount to at the last day. Then, there are all man's unkind and calumnious words ; their perverse interpretations of what those have done or said, whom they happen not to like ; the angry railing reproaches of some, the bitter provoking hints of others ; and, in a word, our reckless way of dealing with our brethren's characters, when we speak of them, as if it were no harm at all, no matter how we provoke or corrupt them. Corrupt them, I say ; for this again is one of the greatest sins of the tongue, when men literally do the devil's work with it, uttering vile words, and bringing forth evil things out of the evil treasure of their heart ; such words and such thoughts, as both come of a bad Spirit, and tend to make others like him. And often, indeed, men invent and utter them on purpose, to ensnare those who are weak enough to listen to

them ; saying, in other words, what was said to Eve, “ ‘Ye shall not surely die;’ why should you be so much afraid of lewdness, of theft, of drunkenness, of any other pleasant sin ? ”

All these are offences of the tongue ; and besides all these there are the too common sins of irreverent and blasphemous words, cursing and swearing, taking God’s name in vain, disrespectful mention of any kind of holy things. How natural this is, the practice even of too many very young children bears witness ; how ordinary, we may judge by going into any crowd almost, whether it be work or diversion for which they are met. Now then let it be borne in mind, that every such irreverent word,—as well as the untrue, and unkind, and corrupting words, which we before spoke of,—is set down in God’s Book, and will be exhibited against us at the Last Day, to our utter ruin, if not blotted out by timely penitence and amendment ; and then let a man bethink himself how he may bear *that* burthen, how *that* account of himself will sound in his ears.

In another way, too, the sentence of our Lord seems very clear to be understood, and impossible to be denied by any one. “ By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned ; ” that is, by the words of thine own solemn promises and engagements ; thy vow in holy Baptism, and again in Confirmation, and again, most particularly perhaps, in the holy Eucharist ; this vow, these good promises, will rise up against thee in the Great Day, and condemn thee, if thou be found then to have gone on wilfully breaking and despising them. And not only our solemn vows and promises, but every good prayer and psalm we have ever uttered, more especially before God in private or public devotion ; this also will tell to our confusion, if we shall have prayed one way, and lived another. Yes, and even in ordinary talk and discourse we are continually uttering thoughts, which if we do not act upon them, will help to make our last judgment heavier ; they will prove us not to have sinned ignorantly, not to have wanted either warning, or a head to understand that warning, had we but a heart to receive it.

So it is, then, that persons who do not right, Christians who do not actually keep the commandments, must needs be judged and condemned at the Last Day out of their own mouths. For if we speak right and good words, then this will but the more

condemn us for contradicting them. And if our words themselves be bad, as well as our actions, they will stand as a separate sin in our account, and receive a sentence and penalty of their own.

What a vivid, what a fearful impression, ought this to give us of our constant, daily danger! Words are the things which will justify or condemn us; by our words we must live and die; and we too often let them pass our lips as carelessly, as much like a matter of course, as the air we breathe; as though we could not help them. It is a danger continually recurring, for we are almost always speaking, or considering how to speak, when we are awake, and in company. And when the word is once spoken, it is like an action done, it is gone out from us, and gone for ever: whether it were for good or for evil, it cannot be recalled. It may be repented of, and sorrowed for, and never repeated, and the mischief of it may be somehow done away, but it never can be recalled. And too often its effects may remain, even when we have repented of it. Moses repented most earnestly of his unadvised speech to the children of Israel, when he smote the rock, as it seems, without due reverence; but his repentance could not obtain him leave to enter into the promised land. David repented all his life long of his corrupting words which he used to the wife of Uriah, and of his murderous words by which he contrived Uriah's death; but his repentance could not restore innocence to the one, nor life to the other.

These are overwhelming thoughts when a man seriously reflects himself, how often he has sinned by words. But let us not forget that by God's exceeding mercy they may be made lasting for good as well as for evil. If a cup of cold water, given in the name of CHRIST, shall in no wise lose its reward, surely the good and kind words also, which are spoken in CHRIST's name, words of serious, unaffected humility, words of charity to men's souls and bodies, words of loyal devotion to GOD, words which sincerely put away sin, and keep it a distance from us; all these, though in their own nature they pass away and are over in a moment, yet by His grace they are in a manner made lasting, and have substance given them. "A word spoken in due season," says the Wise man, "how good is it!" The good words of obedient Christian men are, as it were, turned into deeds; and who knows what may come of them, in the world where all things will be true

and real, and from which shadows and figures will have entirely passed away? Think of the words of the Bible, and of the holy words which JESUS CHRIST has instructed His Church to use in the Blessed Sacraments. In themselves what are they but words? but HE has given them saving virtue, and so HE will to all the good words of all His servants, in their measure, if they live so as to have their speech habitually sanctified by His SPIRIT.

The more we think on these things, the more reason shall we find to pray night and day with the Psalmist, "There is not a word in my tongue, but THOU, O LORD, knowest it altogether." "Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth, and keep the door of my lips." "Look well if there be any way of wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

SERMON CIV.

THE GOSPEL PROMISE OF LONG LIFE.

PSALM xxi. 4.

“ He asked life of THEE, and THOU gavest him a long life, even for ever and ever.”

THIS psalm is appointed for Ascension Day, because it speaks at large of the glory of our Blessed LORD, and of the great love which His FATHER shewed towards HIM, in hearing His prayer, and raising HIM, from the cross and grave, to His own right hand in heaven. It is such a hymn, as we may suppose the holy Angels to have sung, when they saw JESUS CHRIST coming to take possession of His kingdom. Speaking to the ALMIGHTY FATHER, they say, “ The King (that is, CHRIST) shall rejoice in Thy strength, O LORD; exceeding glad shall HE be of Thy salvation. For THOU hast given HIM His heart’s desire, and hast not denied HIM the request of His lips. THOU shalt prevent HIM with the blessings of goodness, and shalt set a crown of pure gold upon His head.” And then we have the words of the Text. “ HE asked life of THEE, and THOU gavest HIM a long life, even for ever and ever.”

Now, it is a strange thing to say, yet if you consider a little you will find it quite true, that this very verse, which king David was taught, by the SPIRIT of GOD, to set down as the greatest possible happiness, would yet carry, to most of our ears, rather a disappointing and mortifying sound with it.

For although it be true that every man is fond of life, yet it is certain that very few appear much concerned about life eternal. Such is their perverseness, that what they love best in the world,—when God offers it to them as His own gift, and in the very highest perfection, it loses its value directly in their eyes. There was a sort of proverb in the time of Job, “Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath, will he give for his life.” But the covetous man will not give, though it be but a small portion of what he has, to make his chance better of coming to everlasting life.

It is plain, that persons thus fond of life would have their expectations raised very high by the beginning of the promise in the text: “HE asked life of THEE, and THOU gavest HIM a long life.” This, they would allow, was a real part of happiness; and the fear of God, if it could make them sure of this, would indeed be worth practising.

But when these same persons came to the end of the verse, and there found that the promised life was *eternal*—not only a long life, but one sure to last for ever and ever—it is likely that they would feel disappointed. If they were ashamed to complain to others, to themselves they would surely say, “Is this all that is meant? we knew this before—we knew that the fear of God, duly practised, would put us in a way of everlasting salvation. But here we thought we should have found a long life on earth added to it; and it is disappointing to find, that after all, good Christians are not to expect to live longer than other men.” And they would hardly reckon that God had heard their prayers, either for themselves or their sick friends, if an angel were to come and tell them, Your own life, or your friend’s, is granted: the sickness, indeed, will be unto death; but afterwards, if it be not your own fault, will come a long life, even for ever and ever. This sort of message would, indeed, be disappointing to most people; and yet this would be only granting them what they asked, life, in much greater perfection and excellency than they asked for it. Is it not, then, a thousand times more unreasonable to be disappointed at this, than it would be in a beggar to be disappointed, if he asked a rich man for a farthing, and the rich man gave him a large estate? What if such an one were to fret, and say he had not the very thing he asked for? should we not stop his mouth directly, and say, No, but you have what is a great deal better?

It may be worth while to consider, why we see the absurdity and folly so plainly in this case, and do not see it in (what is much more foolish and absurd) our own or others' fretting at the shortness of life, or the coming on of sickness or old age, when God is all the while holding out to us the promise of everlasting life.

Now, the chief reason is plainly this, That men have got such a liking for the pleasures and profits of this bad world, that, without them, the thought even of eternal happiness seems something dull and tiresome. For instance: suppose a man given up to the indulgence of his sensual appetites; it is no great recommendation of a good life to such an one, to say that it will bring him into a place, where they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; where "they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in Heaven." Suppose another loving money best of all things: his affections are already engaged, and he turns a deaf ear when you tell him of "a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth." And thus it is plain, that no sensual or worldly-minded man can in earnest desire to go to such a place as heaven. He may, indeed, stand in fear of everlasting punishment; but certainly, if he had his choice, he had rather stay here, and continue wallowing in his base delights, or heaping up his money, for ever, than he would go to heaven. And though he earnestly desires to live, yet he cares not for eternal life. Such is the miserable folly in which we lose ourselves, when we set our hearts upon any thing on this side the grave, rather than upon the glorious things which JESUS CHRIST bought for us with His own blood.

Something of the same sort is the case with many of us, who yet mean nothing but true affection and kind-heartedness, in the sickness and death of dear friends. We ask life for them, and yet are disappointed when God gives them a long life, even for ever and ever. Like the disciples on the day of our Blessed SAVIOUR's death; who trusted that it had been HE which should have redeemed Israel, and could not make out, how then HE should have submitted to be crucified. They were called "foolish and slow of heart to believe" God's word; but surely we Christians are much more inexcusable than they, if we at all permit ourselves to mistrust God, and call our condition unhappy, because of the

shortness of life, when we know that, if we will, we may live for ever and ever. The truth was but just beginning to shew itself to them; they could not as yet understand the prophecies. But we, ever since we were baptized, have been disciples of a crucified MASTER. We have been taught from the beginning, that, as CHRIST, so all Christians "ought to suffer these things, and to enter into their glory." HE knew the way to heaven, we may be very sure, much better than we do. And HE chose the way of the Cross. With that way, then, let us be contented and thankful, both for ourselves and our friends. It is a hard lesson, I allow, even for truly good and affectionate minds to part cheerfully with those, the sight of whom gives them most comfort, and to let them pass before themselves into the other world. Yet who would not endeavour to do so, considering that God has allowed him to hope, that, though life should be denied them for a few years in this world, it is but in order to a blessed, never-ending life in the next? And to fret at this is surely no sign of love and friendship; unless it be love and friendship to grudge our neighbour the best that God could give him, because we have not ourselves the pleasure of seeing him enjoy it.

We see then how senseless and absurd it is in a Christian, who knows men may go to heaven, by God's mercy, if they will but seek it with all their hearts; we see, I say, how absurd it is in such an one to be much troubled at the shortness either of his friend's life or of his own. It would be as if labourers should complain of their employer, for paying them their wages and sending them home before their day's work was done.

Yet, foolish as it is to do so, there is hardly any one, I doubt, who is not guilty of it. Not only in this matter of the desire of long life, but in all the rest also of the things which we greatly desire, we are easily tempted to be thus childish and unthinking. Thus, the rich man in the Gospel went away sorrowful, because he was required to exchange his worldly riches for treasures in Heaven. He could not bear to sell all that he had, and give to the poor; although he had our SAVIOUR's promise, that if he would do so, he should receive a hundred fold now in this time, and in the world to come everlasting life.

As we read we see the folly of this; yet how many are there among ourselves, who, if they should speak the truth, must needs

confess that they care more for the shadows of enjoyment on earth than for the substance of it in Heaven !

This may be the better understood, if you consider that no man in good earnest cares for Heaven,—has any taste or desire for it,—except so far as he has a taste for devotion, and can delight in the thought, that he is with God, and God with him. Now this is what no one can do, whose heart is set either upon such pleasure or such profit as are to be had on this side the grave. But these are just the things to which most of us, body and soul, have given up ourselves ; for is it not plain that our pleasures, generally speaking, are a giddy, tumultuous kind of things, which leave no room at all to think seriously of God, while they last ; and when they are gone, leave us very ill-disposed for such meditations ? And as to our profitable pursuits, though the world calls them more prudent, yet it is plain they engage us too deeply by far. They fill our hearts with gnawing, vexatious cares, as if we had to provide altogether for ourselves, as if we had no God to care for us.

Thus between riotous pleasure and ensnaring profit, it is easy to see how it comes to pass, that although we in earnest love life, and of course love eternal life as such, we should yet find it so difficult, as we do, to set our hearts upon heaven. It is not the mere dread of death ; for many persons have got over that, and are willing enough to venture their lives, whose whole life gives but too sorrowful proof that they are quite slaves to sinful pleasure. And hence, by the way, we see how vain is the comfort and the credit which sick persons appear sometimes to take to themselves, merely from the circumstance of their not being afraid to die. This is no more than may be seen in the worst and most hardened of men, and is oftener, as one may fear, a sign of presumption than of any thing else.

That to be without the fear of death is by no means a sure sign of a happy end, we have the strongest reason to think from the case of our Blessed SAVIOUR Himself. HE shared in the natural love of life, as we do ; and was afraid of death, as we are. As His hour drew near, His soul was troubled, sorrowful, and very heavy, exceeding sorrowful even unto death. He was in an agony, and prayed earnestly, over and over again, that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from HIM. Yet no man ever was

so resigned to His FATHER's will, or so truly heavenly minded, as JESUS CHRIST; "who, for the joy that was set before HIM, endured the Cross, despising the shame." HE had none of that false love of profit and pleasure, which makes us so unreasonably fond of long life, while we are careless of eternal life. HE therefore willingly suffered all this for the joy that was set before HIM; and we see as plainly as possible, that the way to be like HIM, in sickness and in health, is not desperately to throw away the fear of death, but to wean ourselves in good time from the pursuits and vanities of life; "that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found." And as our caring little about death is no sure sign of our minds being in a right temper, so God's shortening our lives is no sign at all that HE is angry with us, or refuses to hear our prayers, when we ask life of HIM.

This we learn from the same portion of His history, which I just now spoke of; namely, the account of His agony. His prayer then was, "FATHER, if it be possible, let this Cup pass from ME; yet not MY Will, but THINE be done." Now to our understandings, at first sight, this prayer would not seem to have been granted; for immediately after it HE was taken and led out to the bitterest sufferings, ending in an accursed death. Yet we know God could not refuse to hear His prayer, since HE was His own beloved SON; for whose only sake it is that HE ever hears any prayer at all from sinful man. And besides, St. Paul has told us, that at that very time, when CHRIST's friends might begin to fancy HIM forsaken, and given up to death, GOD was listening to His prayer for life, and granting it in the fullest manner. "When HE offered up supplications and prayers with strong crying and tears to HIM that was able to save HIM from death, HE was heard in that HE feared."

This, indeed, was the very accomplishment of what is said of CHRIST in the text, "He asked life of THEE, and THOU gavest HIM a long life, even for ever and ever."

In order, then, to make sure of obtaining our wish of God, in order to obtain our own life, or the life or health of a friend, in answer to our prayers, we must first have such a mind, when we offer up those prayers, as our LORD CHRIST had in His agony. HE really meant what HE said when HE uttered those words, "Thy will be done." Consider this; and you will perceive that

GOD, in giving up CHRIST to death, did with HIM exactly what HE asked : first, HE did His own will with HIM, and afterwards HE accomplished His natural desire of life in a more perfect way than we can now, or perhaps ever shall, understand. HE gave HIM a long life, even for ever and ever ; but HE did not give it HIM till after death, not till HE had been made perfect by the things which HE suffered.

When we strive to pray as CHRIST did, no doubt we shall be heard for His sake. When we are ready to trust all that we have in GOD's hand, then, and not till then, shall we have laid it up safe, happen what may. When we pray indeed affectionately for the life and health of our relations and friends, yet had rather GOD's will should be done with them than ours ; then we are sure to do ourselves, and may hope to do them, good by our prayer.

And, lastly, when even in the fear of death we try first to put away all our sins from us, and afterwards to comfort ourselves with remembering, that GOD is the LORD of death as well as life ; that we are in His hand as much in one as in the other : then we are seeking true comfort, and may hope, by His mercy to obtain it. But to ask life of GOD, without a sincere purpose to repent of all our sins, is only adding sin to sin. And to be discontented at His refusing us either life or health, or any such outward blessing, is only shewing that we do not in deed care for the blessing of eternal life. And if we do not care for it, you may be sure we shall never enjoy it.

One word more. JESUS CHRIST has taught us, whenever we pray, to use the same words which HE used in His agony ; that is, " Thy will be done." And what we pray for every day, we must practise every hour. We shall, of course, if we sincerely desire it. Every hour, therefore, and every moment of our lives, we should be practising the same temper which JESUS CHRIST had the evening before His death ; we should be always seeking not our own will but GOD's. And if Christians, knowing all this, will go on carelessly pleasing themselves, they will find too late that they have been passing sentence against their own souls, every time they have said their prayers. For there is no safety, no wisdom, but in following CHRIST's example ; nor any following CHRIST's example, except in preferring GOD's will to our own.

SERMON CV.

DANGER OF UNSTEADINESS.

GEN. xlix. 4.

“Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.”

THE HOLY SPIRIT is here describing the character of Reuben, the eldest son of Jacob. It is the first verse in a long and wonderful course of prophecy; the aged Father of God's people declaring on his death-bed what was or should be the mind and conduct, the chastisement or blessing, of each of his twelve sons, and of the tribes which should spring from them. He begins with Reuben as the eldest; but how different is the warning given him from the expectation we should naturally form of what would be said of the eldest son of Jacob! He is acknowledged, indeed, as first-born, “the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power;” but at the same time he is clearly given to understand that he had forfeited his right; he was now to have no pre-eminence or authority among his brethren; he was to excel no longer. Accordingly, every reader of the Jewish History knows that the tribe of Reuben was passed over by the ALMIGHTY, and not made the commanding tribe. Judah and the family of David, Joseph and the tribe of Ephraim, Levi and the family of Aaron, were the three among Jacob's sons who enjoyed the highest privileges: as for Reuben, neither he, the father of his tribe, nor his descendants after him, ever seem to have enjoyed any considera-

tion above the rest ; except, indeed, that they led one division of the host of the Jews through the wilderness. Thus God accomplished the prophecy, “Thou shalt not excel ;” and the reason is given in the words which come before, “unstable as water.” He forfeited the blessing, not because no good thing was found in him, but because there was no depending on his goodness. He was like water poured out, which has no steadiness, no coherence in it, but flows this way and that according as it may happen. We see goodness of heart in his conduct about Joseph, when the conspiracy against him was going on. Reuben said to the rest, “Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit in the wilderness,” that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again ; and when he returned and found him not, he rent his clothes, and said, “The child is not ; and I, whither shall I go ?” We see here his good feelings ; but another part of his history shows how sadly he failed in doing what was right. Unlike his brother Joseph, he had indulged his bad passions, and fallen into most grievous sin ; which his after-repentance could not so blot out, but that his father reproved him for it in these his dying words, and confirmed the sentence by which God had deprived him, for that transgression, of the eldest son’s portion : “Thou shalt not excel, because thou wentest up to thy father’s bed ; then defiledst thou it : he went up to my couch.” He had given tokens of true repentance for this sad undutifulness and impurity ; yet he had still to endure the punishment of it in this world, and to lose the high place which he would otherwise have had among God’s people. It seems as if, though the wound were healed, the mark and scar remained upon him, and some part of the feebleness also. And we are distinctly told that his instability was the cause of the mischief. He had been taught good principles, he had good feelings, but he did not steadily act upon them.

It is surely very remarkable, that the head of the first of the tribes of Israel should have thus fallen away,—that the blessing of their father Jacob on them all should begin with such a severe sentence upon the eldest. It may well lead us to some serious reflections on the great and peculiar danger of unsteadiness, and the impossibility of keeping our Christian birthright, so much more precious than Reuben’s, if we are not greatly on our guard

in that respect. Doubtless, this verse was written especially for the learning of those among Christians who have good feelings, who feel something of the beauty of holiness, who admire it, and are shocked at crime in others. All of us are by nature more or less partakers of these feelings. God has put them into our hearts; we cannot help them quite if we would; but we may, if we will, neglect to cherish them, and then they will die away and do us no good. The world and the Devil will be too ready to tread out such sparks of duty and piety, if we do not watch them and fan them into a flame. The Cross will wear out of our foreheads, the Baptismal grace out of our hearts, if we do not expressly practise a holy steadfastness.

On the other hand, the true and faithful Christian is marked by nothing more certainly, than by his firmness and decision of purpose. He sets his face like a flint, and is not ashamed. He falls not, for he is founded upon a rock. He withers not away, for his roots are stricken deep into the good ground. He makes good resolutions, and keeps them. He considers beforehand what is right for him to do, what his vow and promise in Baptism requires of him, what a good Christian would do in his place, what the holy Angels would rejoice to see him doing; and having made up his mind, he steadily abides by it. The thought of his resolution keeps him constant, when otherwise bad thoughts would be too strong for him.

Imagine him, for example, tempted in regard of his faith; let the malice or subtlety of the Devil or man be endeavouring to disturb his belief and hope, as he has learned them in the Creed of the Apostles, and in the Church which witnesses and keeps the Scriptures. He may not perhaps be able at the time, perhaps he has no skill at any time, to give distinct reasons for his faith *in words*, or even to shape them out exactly in his mind; but he has made beforehand a strong resolution, that nothing, by God's grace, shall move him from this faith: he will turn a deaf ear to whatever may be said against it. He has made this resolution, and he keeps it, inwardly calling on the LORD to help him to do so. And thus his steadiness preserves him from unbelief.

Another in like manner arms himself beforehand against some temptation of the flesh, which he thinks not unlikely to come upon him; he makes a covenant with his eyes, that he will not

even look the wrong way ; and when the time comes, the recollection that he has made such a vow inwardly in his heart comes in aid of his other good thoughts, and the blessed SPIRIT, well pleased with his holy purposes, gives him help to resist the Evil One, and he does not throw away the blessing of the Pure in Heart.

Thus you see what a great virtue steadiness of purpose is in a good Christian ; and indeed the New Testament leads us to regard it as a most necessary safeguard ; so that a Christian without stability is a sort of miserable wonder in the sight of God and His angels. Thus St. Paul, in the first chapter of his second letter to the Corinthians, thinks it needful to explain particularly, why he had not fulfilled a certain promise of his, to come among the Corinthians at a particular time. It would seem in itself a very indifferent matter, whether he came at one time or another ; but see how anxious he is to tell them, that he did not swerve even in such a thing from his purpose without some serious reason. "When I was thus purposed," says he, "did I use lightness ? or the things which I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yea, yea, and nay, nay ?" that is, can you for a moment imagine, that I make resolutions and break them according to my own fancy at the time, as the way of the world is ? You cannot suppose it ; it would be contrary to that mind and nature which belongs to me as a Christian. "For the SON of GOD, JESUS CHRIST, which was preached among you by me, was not yea and nay," now one thing and now another, "but in HIM was yea." HE was always "the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever." "All the promises of GOD in HIM are yea, and in HIM Amen, unto the glory of GOD by us." As HE is unchanging, and His Promises unchanging, so we His members, and heirs of His Promises, must partake of His stability. By HIM we have stood, and in HIM we will stand fast ; not by any power of our own ; but "HE which stablisheth" both us and you, all Christians alike, "in CHRIST," even as in Baptism HE "anointed" all alike, "is GOD : " GOD, "who hath sealed us" to be His own, "and given us the earnest of the SPIRIT in our hearts." In short, he seems to say, to such a degree are Christians partakers of God's own Eternity and Unchangeableness, that even in such matters as

settling the time of a journey, coming sooner or later among his friends, the Apostle was not to be suspected of doing any thing lightly or at random : how much less could it belong to such an one to break the good rules which he had set himself, and leave the good work which he had planned and purposed undone, out of mere feebleness and instability of mind !

Perseverance, then,—a kind of bold and generous obstinacy,—is a necessary part of Christian goodness. There is no excelling without it ; nay, so many are the snares and dangers which surround us, that there is no chance, but by it, of keeping even the lowest place in God's Kingdom. Lightness, instability, falling away like water that runneth apace, belong to this world and its children ; and are part of their sin or of their misery, or of both. But the Living Stones of the heavenly Jerusalem should be builded firmly into its wall. The brethren of the Apostles must be stedfast, unmoveable, not now doing one kind of work and now another, but *always* abounding in the work of the LORD. So the sacred Scriptures teach, and so the examples of good and holy men—of the Saints of God in all times. But how does this matter appear, when we turn from Scripture and the Saints, and consider what other men are doing, and how we have been ourselves going on ?

We have all of us, by God's especial grace, been brought unto the general assembly and Church of His first-born. We have been baptized, and made members of HIM who is by nature the first-born of the FATHER. As belonging to His Church, we partake of the highest privileges that HE ever gave to the children of men. We have no excuse if we are “unstable,” for HE is in us who is able to make us stand. Who ever might be expected to “excel,” if not those who have the promise of the SPIRIT of all excellency and power ? Yet what is really our case ?

One would wish to speak very calmly of such matters ; one would rather say less than the truth, than make out things worse than they are ; but in all calmness I fear it must be owned, that steadiness in doing God's will is a very rare thing among us ; and therefore true excellency, true Christian goodness, the way of life which prepares men for heaven, is of course equally rare. It is not that man's nature is become worse than it used to be. There is no absolute want, surely, among young people, of kind

and dutiful and even devout feelings. They do not all read the Bible and learn the Prayers of the Church without feeling any wish to be good and holy, and, like the blessed Saints, to please God before they go to their rest. Who can doubt that many before now have risen up from the study of such histories as that of Noah, faithful in the midst of a faithless world; Abraham resigning his only son to God's will; Joseph protecting himself against temptation by the recollection of the ALMIGHTY; and most of all from the reading or hearing of our Blessed LORD;—who, I say, can doubt that many before now have been moved hereby to holy and religious purposes, quite sincere for the time, which yet have faded quickly away, and borne little or no fruit? Our goodness has been too like the morning cloud, and the early dew that passeth away. “Unstable as water, we have not excelled:” even if we have been kept from notorious wilful sin, yet there has been nothing eminent in our service, nothing answerable to our most holy and glorious calling. But the more part of us, it is to be feared, cannot say even so much as this. The most with which we can flatter ourselves is, that we have not been altogether and always bad; we have sometimes really had good and religious purposes, but they have been too apt to melt away when pleasure or profit came in the way.

And if we think over our sad history a little more particularly, we shall perceive, I doubt not, that our fall often went on in some such way as the following:—When we came out into the world, with our high purposes and good resolutions, we found almost all men possessed with a notion that goodness, especially in young persons, must be more or less unstable; that it was well if we had good hearts and dutiful intentions, and were vexed with ourselves after sinning, but that as to not sinning, and that even grievously, it was out of the question to expect it in young persons. Such is the language and way of thinking, which one meets with every where, more or less; and many know by shameful experience what power such words and thoughts have to deaden the warmth of early piety, and hinder people from keeping their pure and dutiful resolutions.

This being so, it is quite plain that to all our other good purposes this one must be added:—we must resolve, by the grace of God, not to measure things by the judgment of men, but to go

strictly by the rule of God's commandments and the meaning of our Baptismal Vow. Youth is naturally shamefaced, and apt to shrink when it cannot go on without meeting with other men's blame and scorn. But Christian youths have need to be reminded that "there is a shame which is sin," as well as "a shame which bringeth glory and grace;" and so have all men, in such measure as their temper continues in this respect youthful after their young years are over, which is the case with very many all their lives long. We should be very often putting it to ourselves,—Is this or that, to which I feel inclined, such as that I may go on boldly in the sight of God and His holy Angels? Is it what I could without pain bear to have told of me hereafter in the hearing of those whom I most honour for goodness?—of the Saints whose praise is in the Bible, or of my own revered friends and relations, living or dead? Such questions as these, if we would inwardly and seriously ask them of our own hearts, would greatly help us in abiding by our good purposes, when the low judgment of the world tempts us most to swerve from them. Our eyes would be thus from time to time opened; we should see the holy mountain, the Church, full of horses and chariots of fire round about us. Our false shame could not hurt us, being kept seriously aware that they who are with us are more than they who are against us.

Another thing much to be guarded against by those who desire to be steady in serving God, is that tendency, so natural to many, to exhaust their repentance and good meaning in feelings and professions and strong words, instead of going on without delay to the calm and sober keeping of the commandments. It seems as if many of us lost the benefit of the sorrow which we truly feel after we have done amiss, because we give entire way to the feeling of it at the time, as a mere feeling. We weary and tire ourselves out, as a child does with crying, instead of soberly and deliberately judging ourselves as in the Presence of God. We call ourselves hard names, and really do for the time think very hardly of ourselves: but the danger is, that at the bottom of all there is a blind lurking imagination, as if this very sorrow of ours tended greatly to lessen the guilt of our sin, and as if we need not afterwards go on with the sense of that sin so heavy at our heart: and so we become easy again, and go about in as good spirits as

usual ; far sooner than we ought to do, perhaps after doing such things as we ought never to cease humbling ourselves for. And when the next temptation comes, the Devil whispers that the burthen of the last sin is not nearly so great as it would have been, had we not repented so bitterly ; and we repeat the transgression, in a secret hope that we shall take off the edge of God's anger for it, by presently mourning for it as before. And so we go on, rather downwards than upwards, in a continual course of sinning and repenting. And what can the end be ?

May it please God to keep us from such self-deceit as this ! and in order that HE may do so, let us deny ourselves the indulgence of feeling, mere feeling, even in the matter of sorrow for our sins. Let us be aware of this particular danger, and pray against it earnestly ; pray that HE who holds our hearts in His hand, may not suffer our repentance to be unstable as water, pouring itself out in vain and useless lamentation, but may make our sins still continue to taste very bitter in our memory, so that we may at any rate avoid wilfully adding to so grievous and intolerable a burthen.

And it will be a good help to this prayer, if, according to the rule of the Church, we set apart certain times for recollecting and inwardly bewailing these sins of ours, and punishing ourselves too for them, to fix the sting deeper in our memory ; fasting according to our measure, and in other matters refusing ourselves enjoyments, of which we have shown ourselves as yet so very unworthy. For what purpose do you suppose that the Church of England, in the beginning of the Prayer Book, has directed that all Fridays in the year should be reckoned days of Fasting or Abstinence ? It was of course to humble, and tame, and mortify the unruly souls as well as bodies of men : that they might have set times, coming often over and over, to consider sorrowfully their past misdeeds, and renew that godly sorrow, which they felt so keenly in the first beginnings of their repentance. If they do not feed it, it will die away, like a fire which is suffered to go out for want of fuel : but GOD ALMIGHTY will surely bless the endeavours of those who in simplicity and truth vex and punish themselves for their sins ; considering that if it was reasonable for them to be bowed down with grief when they first came to a feeling of their wrong conduct, it is equally

reasonable at all times after, until they are assured of their pardon by the absolving voice of the ALMIGHTY JUDGE Himself. And that will not be till the last dreadful day.

By such thoughts as these we may strive to correct ourselves, when our good purposes are likely to prove unsteady: and though we may have forfeited all chance of excelling in virtue, yet we, as Reuben seems to have done, may by His mercy become true Penitents. Let us keep our shame ever before us, not in bitter excitement, but soberly and calmly; if so be we may become not unworthy to be plucked as brands out of the burning, and to hear at the last His healing voice, **BE OF GOOD CHEER: THY SINS BE FORGIVEN THEE.**

SERMON CVI.

DANGER OF DESPONDENCY.

I SAMUEL xii. 20.

“And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: ye have done all this great wickedness, yet turn not aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart.”

It is, I believe, no very unusual thing, however unwilling we may be to avow it, for persons to give way to a kind of despair, when they are called on to repent of their sins. They say to themselves, “It is too late now: it is no use pretending to keep the commandments, after so many years of transgression.”

And what is very remarkable, men change all at once into this method of excusing themselves, from one the very contrary to it, in which they have spent all their lives. We know too well, most of us, by experience, how common a thing it is to break God’s plain commandments, and yet to keep one’s conscience tolerably quiet, with the hope of repenting one day or another. Thus we go on too long, walking presumptuously: fancying we can repent when we will, we fix on this or that time of our life, this or that day, month, or year, this or that turn of our fortunes, beyond which, we promise ourselves, we will surely not go on sinning. Time after time these occasions pass off, and that which we had meant to be our turning point glides as it were away from us, leaving us unimproved, or rather more hardened in sin. At last we get ashamed and tired of dreaming of amendment, and promising it vainly to ourselves: we know by experience

what the end will be, if we again resolve and put off our resolutions : our consciences also have insensibly become hardened, and have lost all horror of sin as it is in itself ; and in this state of mind it is no hard matter for the Evil Spirit to pervert our minds in a way exactly opposite to the former. Hitherto we have gone on, quieting ourselves every day with the notion that we might and would repent to-morrow ; but now he keeps whispering to our disordered spirits, “ What if it should be too late for you to repent at all ? ” Hitherto he has flattered us with our good resolutions, that all is sure to come right at last ; a day, or even a year, can make no great difference : but now, all of a sudden, he begins reproaching us with the same resolutions, so often made, so quickly and easily broken, and would set us, if he could, sullenly and desperately against ever again making any such good resolution at all.

Against such a snare as this, it would seem that Samuel is guarding the children of Israel, in the remarkable words which you just now heard in the text. “ Fear not : ye have done all this great wickedness, yet turn not aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart.” There is something remarkable in the very sound of the words ; “ Fear not : ye have done all this great wickedness.” Why, how could they choose but fear, with great wickedness on their conscience ? But it is plain the words were not intended to check, but to encourage, the wholesome Fear of God. They were to beware of that sullen fear, which would make it impossible for them to repent ; they were not to doubt, that wicked as they had been, and irremediable as their wickedness might be in some respects, still their best and only true wisdom lay in following the LORD for the future with all their heart.

Let us look a little more nearly into the case of those Israelites. We may, perhaps, find it more exactly resembling our own than we might imagine at first thought,

The great wickedness which the Israelites had done was this ; that having been especially chosen and set apart by ALMIGHTY God to be His own people, and having so gone on for many years, receiving from HIM peculiar and distinguishing favours, they were dissatisfied with their own condition, and rather wished themselves, as said the Prophet Ezekiel, “ like the Heathen, the

families of the countries," if not directly to serve wood and stone, yet to take liberties of one sort and another, very inconsistent with the pure and holy character of a people redeemed and marked as they were to be God's own. Their Fathers had many a time fallen into direct Idolatry, as you may read at large in the Book of Judges; but had not, as it seems, formed in their hearts any set purpose of finally forsaking the LORD. They had given way to bad passion and bad example for a time, yet when the scourge came upon them they had repented: but now, as it may appear, they were tired of finding themselves so very completely in God's presence, and under His hand: they would fain have a King like the other nations of the world, because they had a sort of indistinct imagination, that such a change would, as it were, remove them one step further from HIM, who had as yet been their only King, the LORD GOD ALMIGHTY; of Whose watchful Eye and strict Hand they were weary, having found, by so many years' experience, that they could not swerve at all from His service without immediately feeling His severe judgments. It was a kind of bad liberty which they wanted, and they thought they should come a little nearer to it by having one of their brethren for a King over them, instead of being reminded at every turn that the LORD their GOD was their King. They might not, perhaps, distinctly say so to themselves, but HE who could read their hearts saw clearly that this was, in fact, giving way to the Spirit of unbelief: it was the kind of temper which before long would lead them into actual idolatry again. And they would have less chance than before of effectually recovering themselves from that great sin, having on purpose put a greater distance between themselves and their God.

This was their sin; most dangerous to themselves, and most affronting to the ALMIGHTY: so that we need not wonder at the severity of Samuel's reproof, nor at the awful warning which GOD sent them from Heaven, by causing thunder and rain to come in answer to the prayers of the Prophet, at a time of year when such weather was so rare and unlikely, that all perceived and felt that it was God's own miraculous work. It was a voice from above, most mercifully sent, to warn them what would come of it, if they went on in the way which they had begun, and how much worse and more ungodly the temper in which they were

acting, than they had themselves imagined. Their feeling was, therefore, not unlike that of persons awakened from a kind of dream; they were startled at finding how near they had gone to the very edge of extreme wickedness, and there was perhaps danger of their giving way to the other temptation, which the Devil commonly employs when people begin to be ashamed of their presumptuous sins; there was danger lest the Jews should imagine that all was lost, and it was no use their endeavouring to serve God any longer; therefore the Prophet follows up his severe reproof with the gracious assurance, that they were not yet cast off: "the LORD would not forsake His people, for His great Name's sake; because it had pleased the LORD to make them His people:" as they had not been chosen at the beginning for any righteousness of their own, so neither would God reject them for all they had as yet done, provided only that in time to come they would fear HIM and obey His voice, considering how great things HE had done for them.

In all this, may not we as Christians distinctly hear God's voice speaking to us? since we, too, from our Baptism are God's peculiar people, Members of His SON, His Children, Inheritors of His Kingdom: and we too, alas! too often have taken a perverse pleasure in slighting and undervaluing our own privileges, turning contemptuously away from those instructions which represent God as so very near us; refusing to believe that we are His people in a particular sense, such as to make our sins far more inexcusable than those of Heathens or even of Jews could ever be; nay, too frequently priding ourselves on our being as though we had never been christened, as the Jews prided themselves on having a King like the Heathen: just so, must we not own that it has not seldom seemed to us a fine thing to know a great deal of the world, to enter into the notions of worldly men, to feel as they feel, and be praised by them as knowing persons? Surely in this way we have most of us too much to answer for, and our LORD might most justly and reasonably cast us off, if he would, for ever, as people who have broken His baptismal covenant, and have no longer any claim to be reckoned among His own. But HE has not done so; therefore in any case we must not cast ourselves away. We may not, we must not, go on in any kind of

sin, under pretence of its being too late to cure ourselves of *that* ill habit at least.

To be a little more particular. The cases in which people are most apt to give themselves up are generally such as these following. First, when after having gone on religiously and blamelessly for many years, perhaps through the whole of youth and early manhood, the Devil prevails against any man, and he gives way to temptation, slight or strong, and knowingly commits any kind of deadly sin. The same Evil Spirit, who has so far had his own way with him, will presently try to make him think the case desperate. He will suggest to his mind such thoughts as these, "You have broken your baptismal vows, you are fallen from grace: your innocence is gone, and never can be recovered: you may as well enjoy yourself whilst you can." By such whispers the Deceiving Spirit will lead fallen sinners on from bad to worse. But if he cannot succeed in thus making the first fall seem quite irrecoverable,—if people have once taken heart to repent, and struggle out of his snare,—then, as I said, his next artifice is, to persuade them that they may do the same again as often as they please: until, by a round, continued perhaps many years, of real sinning and seeming repentance, he has brought them into such a state, that they feel as if the sin were a part of their nature, and that they can no more do without it than they can without eating, drinking, or sleeping. Thus at first, through a feeling of despair, and afterwards through a sense of thorough incurable bad habit, men knowingly throw away their only remaining chance of repentance, and with it, of course, their only remaining chance of salvation.

One of the sins, in which this sad and fatal process may be seen most distinctly, is the inordinate love of strong drink. When a person first begins to transgress in that way, after many years of sobriety, it is no hard matter for the enemy of souls to persuade him, that now he is a fallen being, both in God's sight and in man's, and it matters not much how he goes on: and again, after he has gone on many years in habits of drunkenness, we know too well how impossible it is to reclaim him.

And if it is so in drunkenness, much more in those sins, which in man's sentence as well as God's bring an irrecoverable stain

on those who are guilty of them : such as unchastity, falsehood, dishonesty. These are crimes on which, for one reason or another, the world has seen fit, in some cases at least, to pass a very severe judgment ; the world, I say, which thinks little or nothing of many other sins, just as bad as these : and thus, when any one has forfeited his character and innocency in these respects, he is apt to become reckless, as if he had no chance ; reckless, not only in respect of men, but also in respect of God and another life.

One might well imagine that the Prophet Jeremiah was thinking on these two sorts of deadly sin,—the unchaste and the deceitful,—when he wrote that most fearful of all sentences, “ Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots ? Then may ye do good who are accustomed to do evil ; ” as much as to say, “ With men this is impossible, but not with God : for with God all things are possible.”

How careful ought we to be of the beginnings, when the too certain end is such as this ! with what resolute and watchful severity ought a Christian youth to put down the first impure thought, to silence the first untrue word, to withdraw from the first tempting touch of that which belongs to his neighbour ! since in giving way he is entering on a path, along which, by-and-by, he will find or fancy it impossible to return ; nay, and it will be impossible, without God’s special grace.

On the other hand, it is well for all, even the worst, to be sure there is hope so far, as that no one holy desire or good purpose, no one prayer or sigh of sincere repentance through Faith in CHRIST JESUS our LORD, can ever fall to the ground useless and vain. We have reason to believe, from the words of our LORD Himself, and from the course of God’s Providence with Ahab, with Manasseh, and with other great sinners of the Old Testament, that any degree of sincere repentance, though it fail to obtain pardon, will at least make the difference of more stripes or fewer, a heavier or a lighter punishment. And this, and the remembrance of God’s infinite mercy as shown on the blessed and saving Cross, and the thought, “ Who knows but I too, unworthy as I am, may find pardon and forgiveness, and a place somewhere beneath the footstool of the lowest of God’s Saints ? ” —such thoughts, I say, as these, ought to be sufficient, and doubt-

less before now have often proved sufficient, by God's grace, to support even an habitual sinner, in his hard and heavy task of learning to do good, when he had been all his life accustoming himself to do evil. People may, if they please, call it a poor miserable unsatisfactory state of mind ; but surely it is heaven itself, compared with absolute reckless despair : and practically, perhaps, will be found nearer holiness, and therefore in the end nearer Heaven, than is the bold undoubting assurance, which some men rejoice in, and others so eagerly seek for.

Hitherto I have spoken of great and notorious sins ; practices which naturally startle the consciences of all men, such as unchastity, drunkenness, dishonesty : and I have shown what danger we are in of becoming hardened in these by a kind of despair, as if, having been long bad, we must of course go on and be worse. A word must now be added on another way of going wrong, somewhat in the same kind, that is, by mere lightness of temper and shallowness of principle : when men, for instance, continue in the custom of profane swearing, or of dissolute wanton talk, or of backbiting and slandering, or of lying in common conversation. These sins of the tongue are apt to appear in our eyes as mere trifles in each particular instance that we commit them ; but put together, they amount to a dreadful sum : and men know it : they have been taught over and over, that "for every idle word they speak, they shall give account at the day of judgment," and that "by their words they shall be justified, and by their words condemned : " and yet, with a sort of incurable lightness, they put away from themselves all serious thought, all earnest endeavours to amend in these respects, saying, "they are too old to learn ;" or, "they must have their saying out ;" or, "it were well if we that blame them had no worse to charge ourselves with : " and many other ways they have of trifling with their own hearts and souls, and encouraging that, of which God's SPIRIT has told us, that "it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison."

These persons are in one thing unlike the sinful Jewish people as described in Samuel ; they are far from acknowledging that in their way of going on they are adding a great evil to their former sins : they look upon their ill words, as I just now said, one by one, not as making up a sum of mischief ; they do not consider that such sinful habits are, as it were, a smothered, inward fire,

gradually consuming the whole body: they want to be roused by the threatenings of our LORD and His Apostles, and to be fixed seriously on this thought, What a thing it must be to go on, day by day, and hour by hour, nay, often minute by minute, offending our great GOD and FATHER by ill words spoken in His hearing, in spite of His direct warnings.

There is another class, who are especially apt to encourage themselves in sinning again by the very remembrance which ought most to daunt and humble them;—the remembrance that they have sinned much and often before:—I mean those who sin mostly in the way of omission; the habitual scorner of the Church and Sacraments of GOD; the neglecter of Prayer by himself or with his family; the Parent who takes no thought for breeding up his child in GOD's Faith and Fear; the Son who can find it in his heart to slight his Father or his Mother: all these are persons who, after a time, make their bad habit itself in some sort an excuse to their own hearts: they say to themselves and sometimes to others, "It is so very hard to recollect what for so many years we have allowed to slip out of our minds;" and they fancy to themselves in some indistinct way, that a little act of kindness or of devotion will go farther, and tell for more, in their case, than in the case of one to whom such acts are familiar; making the great unpleasantness of the duty, which is an effect of their own sinful neglect, an excuse for their imperfect performance of it.

Also in respect of public duties, such changes of conduct as the world can take notice of, such as going to Church or the Communion when they have been long used to neglect it, or governing their temper, or ordering their household religiously, when for all their lives hitherto they have done no such thing; in respect, I say, of such duties as these, there comes in another great difficulty: a feeling of shame at the thought, how men looking on will deride this their late and feeble goodness, which feeling ought to be patiently borne, as a part of the penance due to such a long course of irreligion; but too often people make the most of it as an excuse for counting it impossible to amend in earnest.

Now the example of the Israelites and the Prophet in the text shows how all these and other like cases are to be treated;

we see here how GOD deals with them, and may readily judge how HE would have them dealt with, either by others, or by the persons themselves, whose consciences are in so dangerous and uncertain a state.

They must be spoken to very plainly, as Samuel spoke to those Jews: though full of all kindness towards them, he neither spared them at first, in reproving them plainly for their apostasy, and telling them how infinite a blessing they were throwing away; nor when they had uttered words of repentance, did he too easily admit them to comfort again, as many persons do, out of a false good-nature. "It is true," he said, "you have indeed done all this great wickedness; I cannot, I must not flatter you; your case is very bad; you have need to humble yourselves deeply before your GOD: but this one thing you must do; you must turn your attention earnestly from the Past to the Future; you must live in fear and trembling and watchfulness, that you add no more to your sad and heavy account: 'Ye have done all this great wickedness, yet turn not aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart.'"

This one sentence of the grave and mild Prophet may convey to us the meaning of the whole Scripture of GOD, in its addresses to those persons who have fallen into deadly sin, or habits of sin, after Baptism, and are so far sensible of their danger, as to desire comfort, and express sorrow. To such, GOD speaking by His Church and His Scripture, does not by any means try to soften their penitent sense of ills already done: your past sins, HE tells you, are at least as bad as you imagine them: but they are done, and you cannot undo them; very likely you may for ever have to bear the mark and stain of them: yet despair not; the worst consequence may yet, by GOD's mercy, be averted; only lay hold in earnest of that Cross by which hitherto you have held so slightly: fear always, but not with such a slavish, ungodly fear, as shall hinder you from doing your very best; preserve a holy obstinacy in following CHRIST for the future; take crosses, ill usage, low spirits, the irksomeness of many duties, with all patience and submission, as a part of your appointed penance for past ingratitude: cling to your blessed Church Privileges in hope, as to so many tokens that you are not yet forsaken, yet in awe likewise, as knowing that if unimproved they are wasting

away daily and hourly from your hold : in a word, let your temper of mind, living and dying, be that of the humble Saint, who, conscious of many good endeavours, yet remembering many sad backslidings, and trusting only in God's great mercy, made his confession and prayer thus : "I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost ; O seek Thy servant, for I do not forget Thy commandments."

SERMON CVII.

THE MAN OF WORLDLY EXPEDIENTS.

1 SAMUEL xv. 24.

“And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned; for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and thy words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice.”

THERE is not a more melancholy, nor in some respects a more perplexing, part of the Old Testament, than the history of Saul, the first king of Israel. He had been raised from a low condition by the especial providence of God, and had done his duty like a good soldier against the enemies of his country. So that the Philistines were kept back, and the Israelites greatly helped by him, for many years. He had the particular affection and good advice of the Prophet Samuel, one of the best and wisest persons in the whole Jewish history; yet all the latter part of his life is one continued course of sin and misery. His envy and hatred of David, who he knew was one day to be king in his place, took up all his thoughts. He was miserable, because he could not contrive the murder of his best friend and most faithful servant. And when he found, as might be expected, that God's favour and protection were quite withdrawn from him, instead of doing his best to recover it by true repentance, he turned from his MAKER in despair, and joined himself to His Enemy. He went and inquired of a woman who pretended to have dealings with evil spirits, with the false gods of the heathen; receiving no comfort from these, and finding the Philistines prevail more and more against him, he ended his days by murdering himself.

Now it is indeed melancholy and alarming, to see one so highly favoured by the ALMIGHTY falling away and coming to such an end. No man, surely, should dare depend upon God's temporal favours, or upon the friendship of the best of men, after reading of the sin and punishment of Saul, who failed so sadly at last, though he was made king of Israel by the especial providence of the ALMIGHTY, and though he had the constant affection and intercession of so good a man as Samuel. If men will not labour to keep their own hearts in the right place, it is not either in God or man to do them good against their will.

This is the general impression which we receive upon reading the history of Saul. When we come to examine the particulars of it, we find somewhat rather startling and perplexing, which it will be best to explain before we go any farther. His falling away, we read, began from the following circumstance: When the Philistines were masters of nearly all the country, only a few men still remaining with him, and they gradually becoming fewer, he thought it would do good, and keep the people more contentedly with him, if a sacrifice were offered to God; but in strict obedience to the Law, it ought not to be offered without the presence of Samuel, or some other minister of God. He waited, therefore, seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed; but "Samuel came not to Gilgal, and the people were scattered from him. And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt-offering to me, and peace-offerings; and he offered the burnt-offering. And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt-offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him. And Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together; therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the LORD. I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt-offering. And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly; thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which He commanded thee; for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought HIM a man after His own heart,

and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over His people; because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee."

If we judged of Saul's conduct in this instance by the measures which are common in the world, we must indeed reckon the punishment far too severe for the offence. To force one's self into the priests' office, and do those things, such as offering sacrifices, which God intended they only should do, might seem to the generality of men but a small error, now that it is become so common, even for well-meaning persons, to do what is very like it,—to set themselves up as preachers of the Gospel without any authority from the Bishops, that is, without any authority from JESUS CHRIST. Perhaps, however, there may be a mistake in this; perhaps that God, who took such particular pains, in the beginning of the Gospel, to let people know who were His lawful and authorized ministers, may not be so well pleased, in our days, to have liberties taken in such things, with whatever good intentions.

It is true, some may think there is a difference between the Gospel and the Law in this respect. The Gospel does not, it may appear to them, so expressly set down *who* are the appointed ministers of God, as the Law did. It leaves more, perhaps, to men's faith and honest consideration; puts them more on their trial, whether they will submit themselves to what appears, on the whole, most likely to be the will of God, without waiting for clear and express commands from Him. But the Law spoke out so positively and distinctly, that it was quite impossible to mistake it: "That no stranger, who is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the LORD." It is not said that Saul offered incense; but he offered sacrifice, which was a sort of intrusion on the office of the tribe of Levi. And he did not wait, as Samuel had appointed, full seven days; but being alarmed at the near approach of the Philistines, and the gradual departure of his own army, took and offered the burnt-offering some hours before the regular time.

It was not, however, merely for this, or any one act of disobedience, that the ALMIGHTY rejected Saul; but it was on account of the temper and disposition which he shewed by acting as he did, and which made him particularly unfit to be king over

such a people as the Israelites. For the Israelites, being God's peculiar people, were bound to be always looking towards HIM with peculiar loyalty and obedience. All men are equally bound to love, serve, honour, and obey HIM as their God; but the children of Israel, with whom HE had made an especial covenant, and to whom HE had shown especial mercies, were bound to HIM besides, in a way of their own, as subjects are to their King. They were, to use His own words, a peculiar treasure to HIM above all nations; and were bound, therefore, to obey His directions, and submit to His will, with peculiar and entire Faith and Confidence.

But instead of this, they were always looking and longing after the customs and fancies of the other nations around them; right or wrong, it was a great object with them to follow their example. This foolish inclination had before led them, again and again, into absolute idolatry. They chose to be as the heathen, the families of the countries, even in serving wood and stone.

And now of late the same restless temper had inclined them, in spite of the warnings of God and His Prophet Samuel, under whom, if they would have been contented and obedient, they might have made sure of living happily;—in spite of this, they had been induced to press eagerly for a king to judge them like all the nations, when the Lord their God was their King. This, it is most evident, was nothing else but want of faith and affection towards God. They were uneasy at not being like other people; they wanted to be allowed to take the same liberties that were common among the heathen; they did not like the thought of having God so very near them, and being so immediately subject to HIM.

God indulged them accordingly, and set Saul over them as king. HE had him anointed by the Prophet Samuel, and took care in every way to make him fully understand that he was not king in his own right. He was not left to his own judgment, like the sovereigns of the nations around him, but was in all things to consult God and His Prophets, and do whatever they bade him, how unlikely soever it might appear, by all human calculation, to turn out well.

This being Saul's particular commission,—he being bound,

above all things, to put down that spirit of mistrust and rebellion which prevailed among his subjects; and having so great reason as he had to trust God, even for those of His promises which seemed most unlikely to be accomplished, and to be sure of His being always at hand;—he allowed himself, notwithstanding, to be run away with by mere heathen feelings, and to act like a mere heathen prince, on this and many other occasions.

To be sure, his situation was rather trying. The Philistines, a warlike nation, with “thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand on the sea-shore for multitude,” were close upon him and the few Israelites who remained with him. They followed him trembling, and were daily falling away from him for dread. Indeed, no words can more aptly describe extreme terror prevailing in a country, than those which are used by the sacred writer on this occasion: “When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait (for the people were distressed), then the people did hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits. And some of the Hebrews went over Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. As for Saul, he was yet in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.”

It was not unnatural, that under such circumstances he should feel a little restless and impatient, should look out eagerly after Samuel, and wonder why he did not come. For till Samuel came, he was bound by God’s commandment not to sacrifice; and till he had sacrificed, nothing could be done against his enemies, his army and himself must keep still in their place. This made the men discontented, and they melted away one by one. A little anxiety might be excused on such an occasion; but a man who had the right spirit, the true faith in God, would soon have recollected himself, and considered, that HE saves not by many or by few, that the greater the danger the more glorious and certain the deliverance, provided only you take care to keep the ALMIGHTY your friend.

Saul forgot all this; or rather he acted in such a way as shewed that he was not used to think about it. As if he had been just like the rulers of other nations, who had no promise from God, nor knew of any reason to put especial trust in HIM, he looked only to what was necessary according to the rules

of earthly politics. He asked himself, not, "What must I do to make sure of God's favour?" but, "What must I do to keep the people together?" and for fear of alarming them, he sacrificed, although he knew it would offend God.

It might be supposed that this was only the fear of the moment, pardonable in some sort from the greatness of the danger, and not any settled want of faith. But his conduct afterwards, in the case of the Amalekites, left him without any such excuse, and proved that he never could be depended upon to do right at the risk of displeasing the people. God commanded him to go against the Amalekites, and utterly destroy them for their sins: the people and all that they had, to their very cattle, were to be put to the edge of the sword. He spared them, not out of a false humanity (which would have been no excuse when opposed to the express command of his Maker), but because it was against the rules of human policy, and contrary to the wishes of the people. This was exactly the same kind of transgression over again; and that after the most solemn warning, that it was impossible such conduct could stand with the favour of God. It was not, therefore, mere human weakness, and pardonable infirmity, but it was deliberate and habitual mistrust of ALMIGHTY GOD, which led him to do thus foolishly, and lost him the approbation of his Maker, and the kingdom of Israel.

This is yet more evident, when we consider the manner in which he answers, when his faults are discovered and reproved by Samuel. He is never without something to excuse and palliate his offence. In the present instance, "Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash; therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the LORD: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt-offering." Again, observe the process when he was found guilty of that other disobedience, with regard to the Amalekites. "When Samuel came to meet him, he said, Blessed be thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD.

And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy GOD; and the rest we have utterly destroyed." Which excuse he was weak enough to repeat afterwards, as if it were a sufficient answer to GOD Himself reproving our faults by His Prophet, to say, "The people would have it so:" or, "All my neighbours do it."

But the thing to be observed just now is, how completely Saul's way of excusing himself proves his heart to have been in the wrong; to have been, indeed, utterly destitute of the sincere love of GOD. Compare it with David's behaviour when he was called to account for his sins. He never goes about to excuse himself, but owns his fault at once, and throws himself on the mercy of GOD. "I have sinned greatly in that I have done: now therefore, O LORD, take away, I beseech thee, the iniquity of thy servant, for I have done very foolishly." He is more sorry to have displeased his good GOD and FATHER, than for all the punishment he has reason to fear. It was far otherwise with Saul. For all that we can see, if he might but have preserved his kingdom, the loss of GOD's approbation would have made little or no difference to him.

We see, then, that the ALMIGHTY did not reject this his first chosen deputy, the first anointed king of his people, for any slight fault, but for going habitually and repeatedly wrong in that very respect, which was of most consequence to the due execution of his office. We see also, that the temptation which led him wrong was his regarding the praise and favour of the people more than the praise and favour of GOD.

Now, is there any one among ourselves who is free from this temptation; who can say that he has nothing to blame himself for on account of a like undue respect for human judgments and popular opinions? Consider how much of people's time is spent in talking about one another, how eagerly most of us are on the look out to know what is said and thought of us by our neighbours, how quickly judgments of that sort travel, and how wildly and inconsiderately, with how little regard to truth and

religion, men pass sentence in general, one upon another; and you cannot doubt, that we are all of us in very great danger of sinning in this way.

How is it that people, who have long gone on in habits of sin, especially in sins of omission, leaving undone what ought to be done—how is it that such persons in general make themselves easy, without amending what they know to be so very wrong? They will tell you, they wish in earnest to reform, but they know not how to set about it, their neighbours and acquaintance will think it so very strange. For instance: what is it that leads so many Christians into useless and inordinate expences? why do they go on, year after year, indulging themselves in all sorts of unnecessary things, to the neglect often both of charity and justice? It is because they cannot bear the idea of not doing as other people do. They fancy their life must be miserable if they have not the good word of all the vain talkers around them; much more, if they become at all ridiculous in their eyes. They have not so much steady and active confidence in God, as to venture upon what HE will approve, without fearing or caring for the laughter of fools.

This I apprehend it is, even more than the eagerness of passion, which carries many young people so far, and detains them so long, in whatever vicious pleasures are fashionable, whether among rich or poor. A man is tired, for instance, of bad company and drinking, and willing enough to give it up; but he cannot make up his mind to the laughter and abuse of his worthless associates. Every body sees the mischief in this case: but there are a thousand others in which, though not quite so bad as this, we are however more or less the worse for regarding too much what the world will say of us. Our good actions are less good than they ought to be, and would be, from our having an eye to the praise of men when we ought to be thinking of God. We are too much pleased with flattery, too much annoyed by ignorant and unjust censure.

We may think it strange that Saul, who had been brought so near God, and knew himself to be under an especial Providence, should have trembled so at every idle notion of the people's disliking or forsaking him: but let us only compare our own real feelings with regard to secret and to open sins. Is it not too often

the case, that we shudder, and are ready to sink, at the thought of being discovered by our fellow-creatures, but are easy enough under the consciousness that God knows and watches our secret faults? so easy that we do nothing towards amending them. If so, it is clear we are so far like Saul as to fear the opinions of men more than the unerring judgment of God: and were a temptation like his to come upon us, what hope could we have of standing?

May ALMIGHTY GOD, who knows our hearts, enable us all, without delay, to amend what is wrong in our dependence on other men's opinions: may HE keep alive in our minds such a thought of His fearful presence, as may render us, in comparison, indifferent what our fellow-mortals say and think of us: may the Last great Day be ever uppermost in our hopes and fears, that we may never be afraid or ashamed to do right for God's sake. "For them that honour HIM, HE will honour; and they that despise HIM shall be lightly esteemed."

SERMON CVIII.

THE MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART.

I SAMUEL xvii. 37.

“David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the Lion and out of the paw of the Bear, HE shall deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.”

DAVID, as we all know, is called in Holy Scripture by one of the highest titles that can be given to the children of men. He is called, The man after God's own heart. When Samuel, in God's name, gave Saul the first notice of his being to be rejected from the king's place and state, it was told him also, The LORD hath sought HIM out a man after His own heart, and the LORD hath appointed him to be ruler over His people.

This naturally sets us upon considering what there was particularly pleasing to ALMIGHTY GOD in the character of His servant David, that he should be counted worthy of so high a title; a title, which one might imagine the very Angels might covet.

Now one obvious way of making out what it was in holy David, which is thus providentially recommended to our special imitation, is to see what it was in Saul which forfeited God's favour, and caused him to be rejected. And it would appear as if the Lessons of our Church for the Sundays at this time of year were selected with a view to this very purpose, namely, To help us to understand and imitate David, first, by comparison with his opposite, Saul, and afterwards by setting forth his own character as he shewed it in the fight with Goliath.

First, then, as to Saul's sin, the particular sin which caused God first to cast him off, and make mention of David in his stead; it was taking on himself to offer sacrifice, without waiting for Samuel to come, whose office it was to do so. And why? because he was afraid the people would else be afraid to stay with him; the enemy would come upon him and find him alone. It was just the same kind of wrong temper, as caused him afterwards to disobey the command given him, that he should utterly destroy the Amalekites. He spared the best of the spoil and the chief of the prisoners, contrary to God's known command, because he saw it would be unpopular to destroy them. According to his own confession, he transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and Samuel's word, because he feared the people, and obeyed their voice. In a word, he would not go on simply trusting in God, but mixed his own miserable human devices and policies with the plain commands of the MOST HIGH; nay, and set aside God's Word, because himself and the people could not see the reasonableness of it.

This was Saul's sin; and in reproving him for it, God gave him to understand that he had forfeited the kingdom by it; forfeited it to a neighbour of his, who was better than he, better no doubt in that very respect more particularly, wherein Saul had so sadly failed. This would lead us to expect in David a character full of that good thing, which is most opposite to Saul's sin; to his cowardly, worldly, unbelieving policy. We should expect to find him particularly eminent for single-hearted trust in the God of Israel; obeying His commands at once when he knew them, without looking after reasons, or calculating what might come of it; without waiting to see if the people approved it or no. As Saul blemished all his services by thinking always of himself, his own praise, profit, and consequence, so we should expect to find in David something particularly disinterested: a generous forgetfulness of himself, a mind taken up entirely with his God.

This is what we should expect in the man after God's own heart, judging by the faults for which his predecessor Saul was rejected. And such in fact we find David, as his history comes out before us, and more especially in the account of his combat with Goliath, which forms the Lesson for this Sunday in the

afternoon. There is in it, throughout, what may be called the perfection of the *youthful* character ; a single-hearted way of going about every thing, when once he was certain that the cause of God required it of him. There is a combination of courage and modesty in God's service ; a zeal to do, if possible, some great thing for Him, without any disposition to value himself on it when done. He does his duty, and claims no reward, and goes on serving his master Saul as loyally and faithfully ever afterwards, as if he had not laid him under any particular obligation. In a word, he seems entirely to forget himself, and to be carried on, as by a breath from Heaven, towards every thing that is right and noble.

This is quite plain to every one who reads or hears the chapter with ever so little attention. But two or three remarks may be made, which will serve perhaps to bring out the character of this great and holy Soldier of God a little more fully than all might otherwise consider it.

First, it is well to remember here, as in every other part of the early history of David, that before this time he had been chosen out by special message from God, and anointed to be King, and knew himself to be so. He knew himself to be marked out from the beginning for the highest place ; yet never on any occasion does he show the least disposition to press into it. He seems indeed conscious that God was especially with him ; without some inward call of that kind, it might have been presumption in him to stand forward as he did ; but he takes nothing upon himself, seeks not, that we find, any kind of honour or reward, asks Saul's leave to go, and takes his directions as far as he can, and dutifully and affectionately obeys and serves him, for all his ingratitude, for many years after.

One can judge the better of David's singleness of heart, by comparing him with others, mentioned in Scripture as having had prophecies made to them, that they should one day come to reign. Jeroboam was told that he should reign over ten tribes ; and he seized the first opportunity to tempt the discontented Israelites to rebellion. Hazael was told that he should be king of Syria in his master's place, and he presently committed murder and treason at once ; he destroyed his master, to come the sooner to the crown. These examples show how strong the temptation

to David, to raise himself by putting down Saul, had he been selfish like ordinary men. He might have said, as weak and wicked people in such circumstances often do, "I am but forwarding what is decreed; I am about a sacred work, accomplishing God's own purpose: I know God means me to be King, and Saul to be put down; how then can I be wrong in setting about God's work?" Thus David might have reasoned, had he been selfish and worldly; and on the world's rules it would seem hard to answer such reasonings: but David knew nothing of the world's rules; he went by the rule of Faith. He knew that God has no need of the sinful man, and that HE can accomplish His purpose a thousand ways, without any help from our feeble and unworthy devices: therefore HE left God's promise to itself, and only looked after his own duty.

Observe what his argument was, when Saul would have persuaded him that he was too weak to fight the Philistine. He had recourse at once, not to the promise of the Kingdom, but to God's past preservation of him, and to his certainty that he was undertaking God's own cause. "Thy servant," he said, "kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock; and I went after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth; and he (that is, the lion) rose up against me, and I took him by the beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God."

This is what we should call, in familiar language, a plain, straightforward, manly way of taking things. "God," he argues, "has delivered me once out of one great danger, which I met in the way of my duty: will HE not deliver me this time also? more especially seeing that it is His own cause, the cause of His people. Tell me not of the difference between us, that I am but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth: that the staff of his spear is like a weaver's beam, and that his spear's head weighs six hundred shekels of iron, while I have only a sling and five smooth stones out of a brook: tell me not of such things as these; the Name of the LORD OF HOSTS, the God of Israel, is more on our side than all such things can be against us; in that I go forth, and in that I am sure I shall prevail." This was

the simple and single-hearted courage of David, and thus he proved himself the man after God's own heart.

And perhaps one may add, as another instance of the same sort, the Psalm which, according to many old writers, he made and sang on this very occasion—the eighth Psalm; in which, when he says, “Out of the mouth of very babes and sucklings Thou hast ordained strength, because of Thine enemies, that Thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger,” it is supposed by many that he refers, in the first place, to the wonderful deliverance which God had just wrought by him. By him, who, compared with Goliath, was but a very babe or suckling, it had pleased the Lord to still the enemy, that is, to put down the boasting of the Philistines; and also to quiet the avenger, that is, to silence the restless murmurers among God's own people, who, instead of letting Him choose His own time and way, were for taking the matter into their own hands. Such persons, as well as open blasphemers, God would reprove by such examples as this of the slaughter of Goliath, showing that He can do the greatest things by the poorest and most unlikely means.

This mention being just made of himself, and that in the slightest way, putting off all glory from him, the holy Psalmist goes on to speak not at all more of Goliath, or of what God had just done by himself, but he passes to God's high praises as Creator of the whole world first, then of Man in His own image; and so he ends in a high strain of Prophecy, of the exaltation of Man's Nature in the Person of our LORD JESUS CHRIST. Such a Psalm, written at such a time, is surely to be added to the tokens which the Scripture gives elsewhere of the sort of person that David was:—forgetful of himself, and entirely devoted to his God; naturally courageous and active, and very earnest in every thing which he undertook; and now, in his early youth, giving up himself, with all his courage, activity, and earnestness, to the glory and service of ALMIGHTY GOD, to which, as he knew, he had an especial call.

Such was the person so honoured by the great Lord and FATHER of all, as to be made the most remarkable Type and Figure of our Lord and SAVIOUR as Head of the Church Militant in Earth. For so both the Psalms and Prophets, and the New Testament, do undoubtedly teach us to think of David. We do

not read his history to the right purpose, except we see every where in it the Person of our LORD, contending for our sake with the enemies of our souls. When we read of Goliath, we are to think of that Evil Spirit, who is for ever defying the armies of the living God, and of the powers of the world, which, to the eye of sense, appear so far beyond all resistance of ours. When we read of David offering himself to go and fight with that Philistine, we are to think of HIM who "looked, and there was none to help, and wondered that there was none to uphold: wherefore His own arm brought salvation: HE trod the wine-press alone, and of the people there was none with HIM." When we see David declining Saul's armour, in which it was proposed to clothe him, we may remember our LORD refusing all help from any of the means which men rely upon: becoming poor, that we through His poverty might be rich: making Himself of no reputation, and taking on HIM the form of a servant, and through death overcoming him that had the power of death. We see HIM for the time made a little lower than the Angels, that HE might be afterwards crowned with glory and worship, and have all things put in subjection under His feet: even as David, having been before anointed King, claimed no kingly power, but went into combat with the Giant helpless and unarmed, and when he had slain him, submitted himself to be Saul's servant, to be reviled, persecuted, and banished, for many years, before his throne was established according to the promise.

David, then, by his simplicity and singleness of heart, came to be a glorious Type of our LORD and REDEEMER. And being so, he was, of course, a Type and pattern of His Church also, and of every Member of that Church, in her and their contention with this evil world. His courageous way of not waiting to consider and calculate, but saying at once when he saw what was going on, "Let no man's heart fail, thy servant will go and fight:"—this courage, I say, of young David, may teach us the temper in which CHRIST would have His servants enter on their warfare with sin, especially in evil and dangerous times. HE would not have them too exact in requiring to see their way clearly, and to have the use of all His ordinances made out to their satisfaction. HE would have them take part with HIM and His Church boldly, yet humbly, making trial of the things which

are not yet seen. HE would have them, as HE Himself said, like little children, without fear, because they are wholly resigned to their Parent's will.

That is the general outline of the character which the HOLY GHOST teaches us by the example of David to regard and practise as the true Christian character. More particularly we may mark in it certain qualities, which, being examined, will be found, as I said, especially suitable in young persons, such as David then was ; persons just setting out in life, with all their natural courage and high spirit fresh on their minds ; persons who have not yet thrown away the blessed opportunity of consecrating their best and first fruits to God, and glorifying HIM by an early Piety, rather than by a late Repentance.

Such persons are naturally bold and courageous ; it ought not then to be so hard a lesson, when we tell them to be courageous in serving God ; to look their difficulties in the face, and fairly to meet them. It may be, some temptation or other seems to you stronger than the rest : your natural temper, or the condition of your life, makes it to you like a Goliath, a giant enemy. " This," you are inclined to say, " cannot be resisted. I hope it will not come on me ; for if it does, I shall surely be lost." Nay, but remember what the Church teaches us to pray every morning ; " that we, surely trusting in God's defence, may not fear the power of any adversaries." Let us not use ourselves beforehand to think any temptation irresistible, either for ourselves or others. Fear them indeed we must for ourselves, but we may resist and overcome them by God's grace.

David went out in the way of duty to meet Goliath, not at all ignorant of Goliath's strength, but neither at all forgetting the greater strength which was in himself. He felt in his heart his own high calling, to do and suffer great things for the LORD's people, as being anointed to be one day their King : and what if Saul and all the men of Israel feared to accept the Philistine's challenge ? David had that within him which told him that he need not fear : and has not every Christian the like ? Does not St. John say distinctly of every Christian, " Greater is HE that is in us, than he that is in the world ?" and does not St. Paul, speaking in the name of us all, say, " I can do all things through CHRIST which strengtheneth me ?"

Let no man's heart then fail within him, because of any spiritual danger, which the world chooses to call irresistible. In every age, every profession, every situation and way of life, there is apt to be some such trial as this, some one besetting or ordinary sin, which it is accounted almost a matter of course to fall into; and people have not even the courage to make so much as one good resolution against it. So it is, very often, among young people in respect of sensual pleasures, more or less profane and unclean: so among servants and persons otherwise trusted, in respect of what seem to them little liberties, trifling, moderate acts of disobedience: so among tradesmen and persons in business, in respect of certain dishonest artifices, and modes of gain, which each disapproves separately, yet each practises them without scruple, because he supposes all the rest do. In each of these cases the besetting sin is a Goliath, which those who are like Saul and the rest are afraid to meet: but the Davids, the men after God's own heart, the loyal children of CHRIST and His Holy Church, they will remember the anointing which they received in Holy Baptism, and which yet abides in them: they will go forth to meet the enemy, not rashly, as running into temptation, but by good resolution, armed with diligent prayer: they will call to mind the sign of the Cross in their foreheads, and their vow to be soldiers as well as servants of CHRIST, and will brace up their minds, as true soldiers, not to give way, let others do as they please.

This will be their mind, as to resisting direct temptation to sin and sinful indulgence: and another part of their youthful devotion will be a zeal, like that of David, to omit nothing whereby they may glorify God. They will not indeed hastily press forward, as though they were worthy to do great things in the sight of men, but they will be on the watch for opportunities of denying themselves more entirely than they have yet done, and sacrificing their all to God in secret: and when His Providence really gives them a chance to do any thing to His glory and the increase of His Kingdom, they will joyfully and thankfully do their best, not enduring to hear the God of the armies of Israel defied, His Church and His Sacraments treated irreverently, His clear commands laughed to scorn, as things impracticable and unsuitable to these times. They will, therefore, keep their ground firmly

against all manner of censure and ridicule, as David, when his elder brother reproved him contemptuously, and called his interference mere pride and naughtiness of heart, or at least mere childish, meddling curiosity, as though he only came down to see the battle. When such charges are brought against young persons, zealous in serving God, and in abiding by His ordinances, they may calmly encourage themselves with David's answer, "What have I now done? is there not a cause?"

What do we, they will say, for example, if we attend Church more diligently than some persons think necessary, as often as ever we have opportunity? what, if we look constantly and above all things to the Holy Communion of our Lord's Body and Blood, as the very crown and keystone of our religion on earth, and earnest of all heavenly privileges? what, if we therefore begin early, and continue always, in attendance on God's altar? what, if in order to do this worthily, we discipline our souls and bodies with frequent prayer, with regular fasting, with abstinence from many pleasures? what, if we are very strict in our language, refusing to be entertained with such words as we know the Angels cannot love to hear? what, if we be scrupulously particular as to our behaviour in God's House, and in other respects treat holy things in a way which the world may call superstitious? what, if we be very careful in choosing our companions, taking no delight in the wicked, however pleasant and however much praised by the world; and sometimes practising a holy severity, and withdrawing ourselves from conversations and companies which others think may be innocently indulged in? "Is there not a cause," a great cause, for all these and the like doings? are they not a part of holy zeal, of youthful courage in God's service? supposing them tempered with true humility and serious fear of ourselves, as in God's awful presence, are they not part of that praise which He has ordained for Himself out of the mouth of babes and sucklings?

Surely it is becoming in a young Christian, nay, and in a Christian of any age, to have such thoughts as these, both in arming himself against temptation, and in making and keeping good resolutions for the future; proving his zeal all the while, and trying it, as before God, by such measures as the example of David supplies; not indulging it in mere youthful fervour, in the

confidence and self-satisfaction of high spirits and a light heart, but seeing to it, that he take no praise to himself, that his duty being done in any difficult instance, he joyfully retire not only from other men's praise, but also from praising himself for it : retire, I say, to the contemplation of ALMIGHTY GOD as HE is in Himself, in His Church, and His Scriptures : as David retired from his exultation on Goliath's fall to the thought of his CREATOR's glory and mercy in making man after His own image, and preparing to set HIM at His own right hand.

Again, it will be a good sign of a Christian's zeal being simple and sincere, if he be not anxious to invent ways of his own, but rather do all by the ways which GOD has appointed in His Church, and when these seem to fail, leave HIM to do the rest ; as David, knowing what high things the LORD had prepared for him, abstained entirely from seeking out any means of bringing about his own exaltation. He did his duty, indeed, in destroying Goliath, but was in no hurry for his reward : he was best pleased to stand still, and let GOD take His own time.

If your Christian zeal be thus submissive and patient, you need not be afraid to cherish it, as David did, by the remembrance of past mercies, and special providences shewn even to yourself : you may venture to take every such thing as a pledge of our great GOD and SAVIOUR's gracious approbation. David looked back to the slaughter of the lion and the bear ; and may not every Christian look back on his own Baptism as a special Providence ? when he was delivered from the Kingdom of darkness, from the roaring Lion, who walketh about seeking whom he may devour, and translated into the Kingdom of GOD's dear SON ? And may he not, in virtue of that Baptism, thank GOD, and take courage to overcome the mightiest spiritual enemy, to go on from strength to strength in all holy desires, good counsels, and just works ?

And still, as we grow and go on in well-doing, as GOD's mercies continue increasing, so should our remembrance of them : and every fresh resistance of temptation, every new rule and act of silent self-denial, high charity, and strict obedience to GOD and His Church, will be a fresh ground for us to fall back on, and take courage for the next temptation that comes : and so on till the end of our lives, taking our spring and start from our

Baptism, we may, by God's merciful help, grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our LORD and SAVIOUR.

Can this be too much to ask of a Christian, of one who has been born of GOD, and has the HOLY SPIRIT abiding in him, to transform him into the likeness of JESUS CHRIST? No, surely it is not too much; we may have lost great opportunities, but deep, painful, continued penitence will restore us at least to some low station in the number of those who are thus endeavouring to become "men after God's own heart." And some there must be, at least among the younger, in this and in every congregation, whose baptismal blessing, by God's mercy, is yet entire, who have not yet sunk into habits of wilful irreligion, nor stained their holy robe by any gross sin. To such I would say, Know and understand your own blessing. You are the persons to do great things for GOD: you have especial helps and encouragements to zeal and self-denial, and entire devotion of yourselves. But here lies your trial. You cannot but be aware of some one point of duty which is harder to you than the rest, some one evil thought or work into which you are most apt to fall. This is your Goliath, this is the foe you must defy in the strength of the living GOD. Set about that good work without loss of time, in the spirit of David, with courage and modesty; not in your own arms, but in the armour of GOD and His Church: set about it and persevere: subdue in secret your secret faults, whatever such a struggle may cost you, and you may hope for a great reward. You may have help to slay not thousands only; but tens of thousands of spiritual enemies. Only hold that which you have from your baptism to your grave; let no man take your crown, and who knows but our bountiful GOD may turn that one crown into many, like the crowns of David, or of our LORD and SAVIOUR Himself?

S E R M O N C I X.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF SIN, THE ONLY SAFE WAY.

PSALM li. 3.

“ I acknowledge my faults, and my sin is ever before me.”

ONE of the first things which strikes a person on reading over this verse is the great difference between David and the generality of mankind. For they are continually in the way of setting some one thing which they think they do rightly against a whole life of sin and disobedience ; but David, after a life generally spent in such true and holy courses as became the title which God Himself gave him, The Man after God's own heart,—David, having unhappily fallen into one great and wilful sin, could not at all forgive himself, could not find any comfort in the remembrance of deeds well done before. All his refuge is in God's great goodness, and in the multitude of His mercies ; in the comfort of His help, and the support of His free Spirit. Whereas, if David had been like the ordinary sort of persons calling themselves Christians, it is very plain what the course of his thoughts would have been. He would have said, “ To be sure this sin which I have fallen into is very great, inexcusable, and dangerous ; but I cannot persuade myself that the merciful God will deal very hardly with me, considering how faithfully I have served Him for so many years of my life, how carefully I have kept myself from idolatry, and how gently I have treated even mine enemies, when I might have

taken sharp revenge upon them. Surely, God will set these my good deeds against my present backsliding and impurity ; and I may reckon myself, on the whole, in no such very dangerous spiritual condition."

Something of this sort, I apprehend, would have been David's way of judging himself, had he been no more sincere in his religion than many among us Christians are. But we see that on the contrary he felt as if he could not humble himself enough. It may be, that at first, before Nathan came to reprove him, he had quieted his conscience for the time with some such poor excuses as these : but when God had called to him by His Prophet, all that was quite over ; his former piety and obedience was no comfort to him. How should it, when he considered that the HOLY SPIRIT, by whose gracious help only he ever could do any good thing, was now departed from his soul ; that is, that a separation was made betwixt him and his God ? The very light and life of his soul was gone : what consolation could it be to recollect that in former days it had been present ?

Now this deep and humiliating sense of the sad and bitter effects of sin, and of the loss of the comfort of God's Spirit, was not merely the feeling of a moment, which passed quite away as time went on. It is plain from the remainder of King David's history, that the remembrance of his sin in the matter of Uriah hung heavy on his mind all the days of his life. To use a common way of speaking, he "never was the same man again." Thus when, according to God's threatenings, the judgment began to come upon him, and his own son was raised up against him ; instead of bearing boldly up, as he had formerly against the persecutions of Saul, he went out of Jerusalem with his clothes rent and ashes upon his head, and all that he said and did showed the very deepest dejection of mind. As when Shimei furiously cursed him, and others wanted to punish the affront, David would hear of no such thing, but said, "Let him curse, because the LORD hath said unto him, Curse David." And the whole of his behaviour when his son Absalom was slain would seem to shew that his heart was yet full of remorse, and that he considered the whole his own doing, in that he had provoked God by his sins to bring the sword upon his house. In short, he made the right use of the grievous remembrance of his great sin. His conscience

was the tenderer, as it seems, ever after, and his heart the more humble before his God.

Which now of these two, do you think, is the wisest and most comfortable way? To comfort ourselves, as the world does, after our backslidings, by remembering our former good deeds? or to acknowledge our faults, as David did, and to have our sins ever before us; to make God's mercy through CHRIST our only refuge when our conscience tells us we have sinned, and to be the tenderer, the more delicate, the more humble in heart and in all our conduct ever after? .

This is just asking, in other words, Which is more important, Time or Eternity? Does it concern us more to be tolerably comfortable, easy and quiet in heart and mind, for the short time we are to live here on earth; or to have a good chance, by God's mercy through CHRIST, of eternal happiness when we come to die? If you only want to quiet your conscience for the present, perhaps you are not so very unreasonable in thinking much of your past good conduct, and setting it against your sins, whatever they are; but if you really wish to avoid everlasting torments, and to be happy with CHRIST for ever, and if the only way to be so is to renounce yourself entirely and put your whole trust for salvation in His Cross, then surely you do most foolishly in not keeping your sins before you.

If there be, indeed, such places as Heaven and Hell, if we are, in real earnest, our very selves, to be happy or miserable, both soul and body, for ever, then certainly a light way of regarding our sins must be very dangerous. There is not, indeed, any part of the Gospel with which such a temper can possibly be made to agree. Fallen creatures, conceived and born in sin, nourished up in a world which is condemned to be burned, some day, for its incorrigible wickedness; bearing about them the sentence of death, the wages of their own and their fathers' transgressions; and knowing that in them, as they are by nature, dwelleth no good thing;—how can it be suitable for such as these to be light-hearted, easy, and as it were playful, in their judgment of their own faults? as if the mind and conduct which made our father Adam unfit to stay with God in Paradise, the mind which is accursed of God from the birth, the conduct which makes it necessary for the ALMIGHTY to withdraw the breath of life which

HE had Himself breathed into our nostrils,—as if, I say, all these were no more than the freakishness and sport of children, not indeed to be praised, yet not worth any deep and serious repentance. It never can be right for a corrupt mortal man to make sport of corruption and mortality, or pass them by as things of course.

Especially considering the enemies you have to contend with: our adversary, the Devil, like a roaring lion, is for ever ranging round the fold, seeking who is wandering and whom he may devour. These sins of ours, which we treat as mere trifles, are the very things which he most rejoices to see; for he knows that they provoke GOD, drive away His HOLY SPIRIT, put us out of His heavenly protection, and lay us open to the craft and malice of the Powers of Darkness. You cannot know at any moment whether any sin that you commit be not the fruit of the Evil Spirit himself, invisibly tempting and prevailing against you. Yet you feel no particular remorse at having had him so very near you, and having listened to his evil enticements: it seems to you natural, a thing to be expected and borne with. Can the Devil himself possibly wish for any thing to pass in your mind more likely to suit his purposes, and prepare you to be his slave, than this?

But further: the New Testament teaches the very serious nature of our sins in the most awful way of all, by shewing us CHRIST crucified for them. These, which we think matters of sport, are in GOD's sight of such deep and fearful consequence, that HE parted with His only-begotten SON in order to make atonement for them. These lusts and passions and appetites of ours, these idle words and loose thoughts, which we account very tolerable frailties, cost the precious and innocent blood of the only MAN that ever lived pure from sin,—the blood of HIM who is GOD Incarnate,—before GOD could forgive them. If you want to know what is the true nature of your sins, what sort of a person you are yourself in GOD's eyes, do not judge by your own heart and conscience, nor by comparison with other men; nor by what your fellow-sinners say of you; but look up to the Cross of your SAVIOUR, observe His wounds, His cries, His agony; endeavour to imagine what that guilt must be, which being laid on HIM as our surety caused HIM, the Beloved SON, to cry out, "My God,

my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Fix your mind and heart there; use yourself to recollect very often what Scripture tells us of those unspeakable pangs; pray to have more and more practical understanding of that great and saving Mystery; and you will, by God's grace, be soon ashamed to think lightly of your own sins. You will keep them ever before you, in order that you may never cease to feel grateful in heart to that love unutterable, which caused HIM to endure such things for such vile and worthless persons.

When we feel deeply obliged to a friend, we do not readily excuse ourselves for past ingratitude or unkindness towards him. If you feel that CHRIST is your best friend, your only SAVIOUR and REDEEMER, you will be slow to admit any thought of excusing yourself for your ill behaviour to CHRIST: you will be jealous of your own heart, and of the false good-nature of your friends, when they would furnish you with reasons and pretences for not dwelling much and sadly on past transgressions.

And this so much the more, as you may plainly see, that thinking lightly of the past is the very way to hinder you from real improvement in time to come. For observe what is sure to happen to any man who is not industrious in keeping his sins, as did David, ever before him. No doubt, whoever you are, you have very many secret faults; very many ways of thinking and acting, which flow from a wrong and corrupt principle, and which therefore displease the unerring JUDGE, though, for want of due suspicion of yourself, you do not yet know them to be wrong. How many are there, for example, who speak ill and judge unkindly of their neighbour, out of a lurking pride of heart, without in the least blaming themselves for it, or feeling as if they had acted wrong! Now, this may to them be as yet a secret fault: but if they go on in their present careless way, thinking much of their goodness and little of their sins, then this way of judging others will grow upon them more and more, and will become a presumptuous, habitual sin, drawing down God's severest judgment.

Again, let us suppose one of you far gone already in some habit which is plainly sinful; such, for instance, as common swearing. He, perhaps, is become so accustomed to it, that the oaths and curses come naturally out of his mouth, like the air

that he breathes, without his knowing it. How is such a person as this ever to repent of his wretched and dangerous habit? Evidently by learning to think much of his sins; by fixing his attention strongly on those parts of Holy Scripture which are most apt to make him afraid. His sin may be as shocking, as notorious as possible, it may stare every one else as it were in the face, and yet be a kind of secret to himself; unless he really try and endeavour to judge his own misdoings in time, that he may not be judged of the LORD.

If you suppose the man's sin to be a very fashionable and common one, this will make the case still worse, for he will always have an excuse ready at hand to encourage him in passing lightly over it. "Why," will he say, "must I torment myself with watching against this sin, with repentance, and remorse, and consideration of God's judgments, every time I unhappily fall into it? I know it is a sin, but I know also that almost every one is guilty of it. Men remarkable for good-nature, greatly beloved by their acquaintance, very useful and benevolent men, are guilty of this sin: surely it must be a pardonable one." Is this a very uncommon way of thinking? can it be otherwise than deadly to the soul of a Christian who indulges it? and would it not be at once cured, if we would be as scrupulous in blaming ourselves for what has been wrong, as we are busy in finding out grounds of praise for what has been right in our former conduct?

On the whole, it is plain that the wholesome sting of conscience will be dulled and deadened in that man's mind, who refuses to think much of his sins. The warning voice of God's HOLY SPIRIT will fall on his ear faint and powerless. The very losses, and cares, and disappointments, which DIVINE PROVIDENCE sends in great mercy to rouse and awaken us to better thoughts, will lose their effect upon him, because he has accustomed himself to take all things lightly. There is danger that God will quite leave off correcting; that HE will take off His hand, and leave that man to himself, as when HE said, concerning the incorrigible Jews, "Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more." Nothing, to be sure, can be said worse, concerning men's way of refusing to attend to their own sins, than this: that it is the very way to make even the chas-

tenings of the ALMIGHTY, the sicknesses and sorrows which HE sends on them for their good, useless, and worse than useless, to them.

On the other hand, a tender conscience, a mind like David's, truly humbled, and resolved on principle never to shrink from the pain of looking at its own faults truly—such a mind as this is one of the greatest blessings, the most effectual means of improvement, which the SPIRIT of GOD bestows upon true Christians. Not to spare one's own faults, is the true, the manly, the practical way of looking at things: even if there were no express promise of Holy Scripture, one might be sure beforehand that it is the only way to improve.

Also, if you know at all what it is to love any one very dearly, you must know that the true love of GOD and of CHRIST will naturally make you very jealous over your own conduct towards them, and not easily satisfied with your past ways of serving and honouring them. Look at a truly dutiful and affectionate child: does he employ himself much in thinking how much he has done for his parent in times past, or is he not rather continually blaming himself for having forgotten this or that, for not having done his very best in every possible way for one whom he so tenderly regards and reverences? Where Christian Love is sincere, it will cause you to have the same sort of feeling towards GOD Himself as your FATHER. Your faith and affection will of course show itself by your being always discontented with what you have done, always begging pardon for not having done it better.

Then consider what a great safeguard such a tender conscience as this would prove, to those who by God's blessing have not yet swerved, materially and wilfully, from their first baptismal innocence. What traveller is so secure against erring from his way, as he who is continually observing the road, and very much afraid of forgetting the marks which have been told him? Just so it fares with a young and tender-minded Christian, in danger of losing his way in the journey of life. Let him, by God's grace, accustom himself early to have what the world would call a very nice and delicate conscience: let him every night of his life, when he lies down to rest, think over the faults of that day: and let him not spare himself, but endeavour honestly to see those

faults as they are, and beg of God to shew them to him, in some measure, such as they appear to Him and His Holy Angels. By thus keeping your conscience active, you will prevent its growing hard and unfeeling, as it is otherwise sure to do. You will by God's special grace continue to be as much ashamed of a wanton word, or a burst of passion, as another man might be of adultery or open malice. You will preserve that greatest earthly blessing, which those who have lost, sooner or later, would give the whole world to recal—the bright and fresh character of youth, before it is corrupted by mixing with an evil world.

But this, alas ! is advice and encouragement, which comes too late for most hearers. The world is so very near us, even in our early youth, and our own nature so very frail and corrupt, that few indeed, in any congregation, can be supposed to have preserved their baptismal innocence. But so much the more need have they to acknowledge their faults, and keep their sin ever before them. So much the more need to revive their lost tenderness of conscience, by earnest recollection of the many things in which they daily displease God, not only by doing, saying, and thinking what is against His commands, but also by leaving undone, unsaid, and unthought, what they know He approves of. Do you sadly and earnestly endeavour thus to know the plague of your own heart, not only by general acknowledgments, or even passionate occasional feelings, that you and all men are miserable sinners, but much more by a sober and humble consciousness of your own particular faults and negligences. Thus God's HOLY SPIRIT will accomplish for you gradually that great work—far above human power—of making your hardened and seared conscience young, tender, and active again. And thus, what is above all, daily knowing more of yourself, that is to say, more of your sins, you will be daily brought nearer and nearer to Him who alone can save sinners, taught to rely altogether on Him, and made to partake more and more of the pardon and holiness which is only to be found by the Cross.

SERMON CX.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF SIN, THE ONLY COMFORTABLE WAY.

PSALM li. 3.

“I acknowledge my faults, and my sin is ever before me.”

It may seem, and, I doubt not, to most persons it has seemed before now, as if the continual recollection of one's sins, according to this example of David, and the plain advice of Holy Scripture, must make life very melancholy. And upon this, people easily persuade themselves that it could not be the intention of our good and merciful God, who giveth us all things richly to enjoy, that we should pass our time here in penitential sorrow. Therefore they go on without scruple, determined to “let nothing daunt them,” to take all their own sins, and all the threatenings of ALMIGHTY GOD, easily and coolly; to amuse themselves while they live here, as if they were quite sure that all will turn out well for them in the end.

This plan, however, seldom or never answers, even with regard to the false peace of this present evil world. If nothing else happens, their bodies decay, and that will not let their minds be easy. Cares, more or fewer, will come on: they do not go the right way to obtain God's HOLY SPIRIT to assist in bearing them: and so they go on, grumbling and fretting, without any real and abiding comfort, and sink at last into their graves without any solid Christian Hope.

How much happier those who will be persuaded, before it is too late, to take the advice of God and His Church, and daily judge themselves for their past sins, that they may not be judged of the LORD. Such persons, I say, take the only method to insure themselves anything like true peace of conscience. It is true, to receive this saying at first requires some little Faith. When we are told, that vexing ourselves on purpose for our transgressions is the way to be more peaceful and easy in mind, this sounds at first like a hard saying. But let a man have as much faith and trust in the great PHYSICIAN of our souls, as we all of course have in those whom we consult for our bodily health, and the matter will be plain enough. Men do not scruple putting their bodies to some present pain and disorder, because they have faith in their advisers, that such application will make them easier by-and-by. Why will they not take God's word, as to the effect of a painful repentance in giving their souls ease and quiet? Let them only make the trial, steadily persisting for some good while in the practice of watching and rebuking themselves. They will find that God's HOLY SPIRIT has an infinite number of ways of His own, ways which they never dreamed of, for quieting the truly contrite spirit, and teaching a kind of sober rejoicing in the LORD, even at the same time that men are humbled by the attentive remembrance of their own transgressions.

For when we bid a man, after David's example, to have his sins ever before him, it is not that we mean him to dwell on his sins *alone*, as sometimes men do when their minds and bodies are distempered, and they *wholly* swallowed up with a bitter feeling of remorse. That was not David's repentance: that is not Christian repentance. For when a man's heart, by God's grace, is truly touched with a sense of his sins, as committed against his divine and merciful SAVIOUR, he naturally seeks that SAVIOUR in prayer, he looks to His gracious words in the Gospel, he anxiously inquires of His Church whether any way remains, and what is the best way he can take for showing a better and more thankful mind. He looks in the Scripture as earnestly as a repenting child would look into a letter or message from his offended father: and what is the message which he finds there? "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I

will give you rest." "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." He looks in the Scripture, and what sort of examples does he find? Not perfect, spotless, angelical beings, but sinners, frail men like himself, who, by the help of God's HOLY SPIRIT, laid hold of His gracious pardon offered to them by His SON, recovered His favour, and saved their souls. To be sure, the remembrance of our past offences is of itself sad and painful enough: but that is not the question: we cannot avoid *that*; for come it will, sooner or later: but the question is, Which would you rather, remember them when it is too late to cure them, or remember them while you have the Holy Scripture in your hands, the Church and the Sacraments within your reach, the noble examples of the Saints and Penitents of old still possible to be followed by you? It is painful enough in any case to be obliged to acknowledge that one has any grievous bodily distemper: but the fact being so, which would you prefer—to know it, and think of it in good time, or to wait till it was become quite incurable? Depend upon it, he who reads his Bible humbly and continually, *because* he has his sins ever before him, will find his Christian care and fear soon rewarded, even in the way of present peace and consolation. He will be often withdrawn from himself to contemplate the glorious and engaging patterns which God's Book will show him among God's people. It will be in some measure as if in the midst of his remorse he had had a visit from Abraham, or David, or St. Paul, or even from our blessed LORD Himself. He will feel by degrees as all men, by God's grace, would feel in such holy society; not less sorry and ashamed of his sins, but more and more enabled to mix with his shame and sorrow steady resolutions of avoiding the same for the future, and assured hope, through God's assistance, of becoming really and practically better.

Above all, you must think much and often of your sins, if you would have true and solid comfort in thinking of the Cross of CHRIST. Those who do not know something of the misery to which they would have been left, if their justly offended God had passed them over; how can they ever be duly thankful for His infinite condescension and mercy in dying for them? Is not this the very reason why the great body of mankind care so very little for the Cross, namely, that they never seriously consider what

would have been their own lot without it? They do not in earnest acknowledge their faults; their sin is never before them, such as it is really: they only acknowledge in general that they are sinners, but hoping they are no worse than other people, they do not appear to themselves to need any particular redemption or relief. The consequence is, the glad tidings of the Gospel fall on their ears like a dead letter. They have been told indeed that CHRIST died for them, and that the HOLY SPIRIT of God came down to prepare them for eternal life. But it seems to them a mere matter of course: they feel no particular need either of pardon or sanctification. If they would learn to be a little more serious: if they would open their eyes, and really look at their own ways compared with God's Word: if they would keep but one day's fair account of the hundreds and thousands of sins and negligences by which they are daily offending their God: if they would but try to see how nearly they are treading on the brink of endless destruction: they could not surely be so indifferent to the doings and sufferings of the SON of GOD. But let them once understand their danger, let them be once duly humbled, and then, when they turn to the Cross, they will begin really to taste and see how gracious the LORD is. Let them know how frail and weak they are, and they will a little comprehend how inestimable the blessing of having an ALMIGHTY FRIEND near them, even the most HOLY SPIRIT of GOD, to support them in all dangers, and strengthen them in all temptations. We see in the Communion Service, that in the Church's judgment no one is fit to partake of the signs of the LORD'S Body, except he can say from his very heart, that "the remembrance of his sins is grievous unto him, and the burthen of them intolerable." The greatest blessing in this world, the worthy participation of the LORD'S Supper, is only to be had on that very condition, which inconsiderate persons think would be depriving life of all enjoyment—the remembrance and deep feeling of the woe and burthen of our sins.

Then let it be considered, that by such grave thoughts of ourselves, we keep up a continual recollection of God's Presence; which, to be sure, to a helpless being, wanting support every moment, must be the greatest of all consolations. What I mean is this:—take two persons equally exposed to the changes and

chances of life, and let the chief difference of them be, that the one is used, on Christian principles, to examine himself, and judge and condemn himself for his own faults, daily, every evening of his life: the other, to pass things over lightly, just as the generality of people do. Then let us suppose some sorrow or sickness, some great calamity, to fall upon both of them: which of the two will be best able to endure it? which will have most root in himself? The one, being used to try and judge himself, as in the presence of GOD ALMIGHTY, is used to think of HIM as present. He may say as David did, "I have set GOD always before me, for HE is on my right hand, therefore I shall not fall." Come what will, therefore, the man of scrupulous tender conscience, who acknowledges his faults, and keeps his sins ever before him, will know at once which way to look. His eye will turn immediately upwards, in humble acknowledgment that whatsoever his sorrow is, "he knows for certain that it is GOD's visitation." Bitter as his trial may be in many respects, it comes accompanied by this consolation, that it proves GOD not to have forsaken him. He is not left alone in the world. The affliction shews that his Heavenly FATHER still thinks him worth the chastening, still owns him as a son. "For what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?"

These, I say, when affliction comes, are the natural thoughts of that man, who makes it his business to correct himself for his sins, and keep them always before him. But how is it with the other sort of person, the man who lets nothing alarm him? who passes lightly over every thing? What has he to cheer and support him, when his hour of affliction comes, as come it must, sooner or later, to all; and when his mere natural spirits flag, and he is thrown back upon his own thoughts for comfort? Must he not feel in a great measure without hope, inasmuch as he has in a great measure lived without GOD in the world? He has not been used to place himself from time to time before the Throne of his Judge; to pour out his heart before him; to confess all his sins as to a merciful and all-knowing FATHER. Of course, then, it is strange to him, and out of his way, to seek for refuge, and shelter, and relief, in the ever-open arms of the same indulgent FATHER. He is like a ship in the wide sea, tossed about without knowing which way the haven lies. But

if, sensible of his own weakness and peril, he had been used continually to watch his own transgressions, and not to let things pass away as in a dream, then he would be like the same ship, caught indeed in a storm, but guided by a careful pilot, who had watched, and not lost his reckoning, and was aware what course to take.

In another way, the remembrance of our sin and unworthiness may help us against worldly care and anxiety. If we have it deep at heart, it will make us very resigned, and ready to bow with submission to the will of our chastening FATHER, as being thoroughly convinced that we have indeed deserved much worse, and humbly hoping to be so weaned from our bad ways, and to learn so much patience by our trials in this present world, as may prepare us, by Divine grace, to be received into rest and glory hereafter. According to the saying in the Book of Lamentations: "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" and to that other saying in the Prophet Micah, "I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against HIM."

By the same rule, much thought of our own unworthiness, and of the spiritual danger we are in, will make us very indifferent to worldly things: as those well know who have at any time felt more than usually dejected on recollecting their many provocations against their Maker, and considering what must become of them should HE call them before they have truly repented. When such thoughts are strong on a man's mind, he loses his relish for the things which are accounted the chief prizes of this world. It is nothing to him whether he is rich or great, he is swallowed up with the awful meditation what is to become of his soul for ever. This, which has been most men's feeling occasionally, would be every man's feeling by regular habit, if he would regularly reprove himself for his faults, and endeavour to see them as the Holy Angels do. Now, who does not see that whatever takes him off from worldly cares and anxieties, would be so much added to the quiet and comfort of his life? Who would not bear the pain which strictly watching his own sins must occasion, for the sake of that calmness and evenness of mind which good Christians enjoy, because, by God's grace, they have but one great care, but one thing much at heart,

namely, the saving of their souls ; and by the same grace they are in a fair way to make sure of that for ever ? Certainly such unity and steadiness of purpose, such constancy and tranquillity of heart, such freedom from the wild and childish passions, which distract the impenitent unrenewed heart ten thousand ways at once,—certainly these are great blessings, even here in this present life. And these are only to be obtained by those who will consent to have their hearts thoroughly humbled, by the constant watching of their own transgressions and backslidings.

Then, when God's SPIRIT has thus taught men to believe themselves to be unworthy persons heartily,—which is indeed a much harder lesson than we can understand, till we have thoroughly tried,—but when we have heartily learned our own unworthiness, the lessons to be learned from the sufferings of our Blessed SAVIOUR will sink the deeper into our hearts ; we shall be ashamed to murmur at our light affliction which is but for a moment, considering what HE endured who was without spot and blemish, “ purer than an Angel, and brighter than the Morning Star.” Supposing that we are reproached, that will come into our minds which our LORD Himself hinted to His Disciples : “ If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more them of His household !” A truly humble person will even be alarmed, if he find himself going on for any length of time without God's fatherly chastisements. He will fear lest, for some sin of his, God does not think him worthy “ to be made like unto CHRIST, by suffering patiently adversities, troubles, and sicknesses.” So much the more contentedly, and even thankfully, will he bear such trials when they come, however grievous to flesh and blood, being now sure that God means him good, since HE has given him an opportunity of being conformed to the image of His SON.

Also, when we are speaking of Confession, another thing is much to be considered,—the relief which God has provided for sick souls, by inviting and encouraging them to confess their sins to their brethren ; not to any of their brethren, but to those whom HE has called from among the rest to be His Ministers, partly for this very purpose, that they may receive private Confession, and administer private Absolution, in His Name. As it was, no doubt, a great relief to the unhappy lepers among the

Jews, that they were to come to the Priest, and tell him all, and he was to judge of their case, and use all gentleness and discretion towards them: so if we would oftener follow the advice and direction of our Church, and lay open our conscience to the Priest, when we find it troubled with any weighty matter, it could not fail greatly to relieve us, and help towards the cure of our sick souls. The pain and shame itself of confessing would, doubtless, in many cases be very great; but if borne patiently for CHRIST's sake, it would do good as other tribulations do, besides the secret and mysterious blessing which our LORD has joined to the right use of all His holy Church ordinances. Then as the Leper would feel sure consolation, on being told by the Priest that his leprosy was really cleansed, the hand of God taken off, and he free to enter into God's Sanctuary again: so who can say what comfort and strength it might give any of us Christians now, if, having a burthened conscience, he were to open his grief to the Priest with entire humility and truth, and if having obediently followed good advice, and shown good signs of true and enduring repentance, he should hear the gracious words, "I absolve thee from all thy sins," spoken to him with authority by one of those to whom our LORD Himself said, "Whose sins ye forgive, they are forgiven?"

Surely in such an one, according to the measure of his sincerity, the gracious Psalm would be accomplished,—“While I held my tongue, my bones consumed away through my daily complaining: Thy hand was heavy upon me day and night.” But “I acknowledged my sin unto THEE, and mine iniquity have I not hid: I said, I will confess my sins unto the LORD; and so Thou forgavest the wickedness of my sin.” Thus speaks David, who had confessed his sins, not to God only, but also to God's Prophet: and so he found absolution and relief. Though he still bore about him, sad and heavy, the remembrance of what he had done; though the mark continued upon him, yet he had comfort and assured hope, in knowing that God had so far put away his sin, that he was not to die for it: he was in a way to be quite cured at last, if he would but persist in his humble remembrance of his sin, and in true obedience, till his trial was over.

On the whole, is not the point made clear, which at first may sound strange to the inconsiderate, namely, that continual re-

membrance of your sins, according to the advice and example of David, is the only way to have tolerable peace of mind? For this will lead you to Holy Scripture, and to the great and noble examples there. This will lead you to the foot of the Cross, will set you upon seeking God's HOLY SPIRIT by confession and absolution, by His Sacraments and by untiring Prayer. This will keep it ever in your heart, that God is present observing your ways. Worldly cares and worldly fears will pass away like light clouds over your mind, when the serious thought of your sin and danger is become habitual to you. You will be braced up to endure sorrow, knowing that it is fully deserved; and whilst with all thankfulness you receive the thousand blessings, the least of which you know is greater than the best of your merits, you will be continually humbled and sobered by the remembrance of what HE suffered, Who never deserved any ill. And thus, not being high-minded, but fearing, you will make every day's remembrance of your past sins a step towards that eternal peace, in which there will be no need of watching against sin any more.

SERMON CXI.

DANGER OF IRREVERENCE.

2 COR. iii. 6.

“Who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”

WE may well inquire how it is that the letter of Scripture, in distinction from the spirit of it, is spoken of as so dangerous; for we doubt not that the letter of it is from God; and therefore cannot be in itself evil, but must be good and life-giving. And the same may be said of sacred forms in religion, such as the Church affords us; if they are, as we trust, from God, they cannot be in themselves evil, but good and profitable. But of course what is meant is, that there is a danger of our misusing the letter to our hurt, from our not having the true spirit of a Christian. In the same way that our bodily food is good and necessary for life, but if there is not strength and health in the constitution to digest the food, and to turn it into nourishment, it will become hurtful, and do harm instead of good.

There can surely be no part of Scripture, either new or old, but must have been very good to the Jew formerly, and to the Christian now, unless it is by his own bad use of it; for we know how the Psalmist speaks of the Law throughout the 119th Psalm, the words of which were “sweet unto” his “throat,” and “sweeter than honey unto” his “mouth.” Which could not have been the case unless they were full of profit and bless-

ing to him, and to all good men; for he says there is great peace to them that *love* it, and are not offended at, or made to fall by it.

And if the Word of God itself, so infinitely gracious and holy, can be rendered hurtful by the perversity of men's evil hearts, so, in like manner, may be all outward forms of religion: and indeed all observances of the commandments of God, which are in the letter and not in the spirit.

But surely no one would say that the Holy Scriptures, both old and new, ought not to be read constantly and diligently, because the letter of them is dangerous without the spirit: and no one ought to say but that the forms of religion, such as that of daily prayer and the like, ought not to be observed diligently and constantly, though there may be danger in a wrong use of them.

But, however, it is evident, from the many cautions of Holy Scripture, that there is some peculiar danger we are all in, of taking the outward form and shadow of religion for its life and substance. The many cautions of our Blessed SAVIOUR to the Jews of His day on the subject, so frequent, so strong and awful as they are, every seriously thinking person must consider as applicable in some way to ourselves; inasmuch as human nature is always liable to the same dangers: and as the Apostle has warned us that in these latter days the great corruption of Christians will be marked by this circumstance, their "having the form of godliness, but denying the power of it," we should be particularly watchful upon this subject.

Now, perhaps, the most common and obvious instance of this dangerous self-deceit is that of going to Church, and there kneeling or sitting down while the Minister is praying, or even joining with him in words, without attending or considering them, and therefore asking for mercy without really feeling the want of it, from not thinking of our great need of it. And when the Scriptures are read, either not attending to them at all, or not applying them each to himself. Now this is, of course, very hurtful to us, because it produces a habit of indifference to sacred things, and inattention to prayer; which are some of the worst things which a Christian has to dread, lest they should grow upon him; and also, because it makes the worship of God, which ought to be a delightful service, tiresome and painful, so as to

lead a person to think, as the Jews said of old, "what profit is there that we have kept His ordinances," and "what a weariness is it" in serving HIM. The Psalmist speaks of the Law of God being delightful to him, pleasant as food to his taste, and sweet as honey. But, to take the illustration given before, unless a man is in health food is not pleasant to him, and honey is not sweet to him, and will neither nourish him nor do him good; and so, also, unless a person will rightly dispose himself to the worship of God, such service will neither be pleasant to him, nor will profit him or make him any the better, but rather will lead him to loath and disrelish sacred employments, and indispose his heart to serious prayer. And surely no greater evil than this can happen to us in this world.

But this is, perhaps, the most obvious and plain instance of our keeping up "the form" of religion, and losing "the power" of it; so much so, that when Formalism is spoken of, it is, generally, merely to caution persons against this error, or some that is considered akin to it, such as fasting, which Scripture and the Church have so much recommended to us as a means of grace. And, indeed, so much is said against these dangers as to have led persons into a general neglect of these most necessary duties, for fear of their being abused and made mere forms. And with, perhaps, almost equal reason, might men be induced to dissuade us from the study of Holy Scripture, because "the letter killeth," and "the spirit" alone, contained therein, "giveth life."

But it will never profit us to give up a known duty and means of grace for fear of misusing it; for the same evil spirit is quite sure to follow us, and to deceive us in some other shape. For this is not curing the disease, but only driving it to another part, and perhaps to a more dangerous one.

The same kind of formalism, that is to say, a method of adopting an outside appearance of religion in the place of that which is from the heart, now very extensively prevails in another shape; the custom of taking up religious expressions, and certain outward forms of speech, and a mode of talking respecting our most adorable and Blessed SAVIOUR, and many other things, which, if sincerely believed, would imply very great holiness, some such as none but a very good man could use without insincerity, and yet such as a truly good man would scarce dare to use.

Now all this seems to me a great system of formalism ; because it is very evident how it may all be, without a person ever being any the more truly humbled before God. For it is directed to the eyes and ears of men ; it is not directed to the eyes of the all-knowing God, who seeth in secret : and unless a person is very diligent and watchful himself in keeping the commandments of God, and in urging them upon others in all possible ways, I do not see how this can be otherwise than a very great snare to his conscience, as a kind of formalism, and one of the easiest kind. To go to Church very often without attending to the service there, is not so bad a kind of formalism as this, because it requires more trouble. To hear Scripture read, and not attend to it : to hear the Minister pray, and not pray with him, is no better than formalism : but it is a worse formalism to quote the words of Holy Scriptures ourselves without attending to them ; and to use holy words of prayer to the Most High without thinking of what we are doing. And so, also, with regard to Baptism and the Lord's Supper, unless we seriously consider the high and heavenly things contained in them, it is rendering them mere forms, and making the chief and most important parts of our religion no better than those Jewish observances and ceremonies, the adhering to which, St. Paul tells us, would be so dangerous ; keeping to the letter that killeth, and not to the spirit which giveth life.

And what renders this kind of formalism so peculiarly dangerous is, that it enters into the very holiest things of religion, and makes a mere form and profession of things which are the most concerning and affecting of all ; things which ought not to be thought of, much less spoken of, without reverence and awe.

For let it be allowed that Faith in the merits of CHRIST, and in the Justification of His HOLY SPIRIT, are the most important subjects in the whole of the Bible, so much so, that they make up the whole of religion, and that to hold them rightly is eternal life. But if the most important, then they must also be the most divine and holy, and if so, then is the danger much greater than on any other subject, lest we should not consider them with sufficient attention and seriousness. The danger of formalism upon this subject must be far greater than upon any other.

Nor do these observations apply only to any particular class of

persons or opinions, but, in some shape or other, *to all of us* alike, in all our approaches to God, and imperfect ways of serving HIM ; for all true religion depends upon our endeavouring from the heart to please God, and doing every thing we do from the love and fear of HIM. But whenever we have formed any little regular habits of devotion, there is a danger of our resting in them as forms, and not advancing in the knowledge of God; and still greater danger of our wishing to persuade other people that we are religious, instead of being so. How common is it with regard to the observance of the LORD's day ! Many think that if they go to Church, and do nothing in the way of amusement and employment all day, that they are doing very well ; but surely, if this is all, it is little better than mere formalism. Sunday is, in an especial manner, a day of thanksgiving, to commemorate the Resurrection of our LORD ; and business or worldly employment are chiefly objectionable on this account, that they keep us from heavenly employments, which consist in devotion to God, and any little works of charity to man.

The whole of the matter will in short come to this,—that we have very great need, *every one of us, without exception*, to labour after a habit of reverence,—unaffected and quiet reverence, in every thing whatever pertaining to God, and in all those things in which HE is graciously pleased to give us tokens of His presence among us.

“ Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them :” such are the words of CHRIST Himself ; and this thought should make us stir up ourselves to very reverend attention whenever we come into God's house, and all the while we are there ; not to any overstrained feeling, but to humble and attentive thoughts. Surely it is very little to say that we should feel as if we were coming into the nearer presence of a Great KING, or of one whom we loved and dreaded very much ; to be thinking of other things and persons, cannot but be great disrespect to His Divine MAJESTY.

Or again : “ This is my Body,” are words respecting the Holy Communion which imply something very much more than this,—the life-giving presence of JESUS CHRIST, in some very awful manner, a savour unto life and also of death ; though it would be irreverent in us to explain how or in what manner He is present. No

miracle which our blessed SAVIOUR worked on the bodies of men, is greater than that which HE works at the Holy Communion on their souls. If this be the case, which we doubt not, how very cautious ought we to be lest we should do dishonour to His Body and Blood; lest we be like those Jews of old who, when HE was present among them, knew HIM not; and having no sense of His presence, received no benefit from it, but rather perdition. We should stir up ourselves both before and after, to devout thoughts respecting it, lest we should forget, and not discern therein the LORD'S Body.

In the next place, with regard to Scripture, we should use ourselves in every way to a reverential regard for it, as considering that in every part of it it contains a Spirit that giveth life. We know how people look upon any thing which has been given them by a very dear friend whom they have valued and loved; they value it according to the love they have for their friend. Or what would they think of a letter from a friend in a distant country? Surely, therefore, the manner of our receiving Holy Scripture will prove the state of our hearts towards GOD.

Now these things here mentioned are not certain feelings, to be called up and put on at certain seasons only, but they are the actions in which a reverential habit of mind shows itself. We must at all times be practising a deep reverence towards GOD, and praying for it; and these are the occasions in which it will show itself in express acts.

For GOD we know is always present; and the great difference between bad and good men is this,—that the latter are in some degree sensible of GOD'S presence, and the other are not. For HE is in some wonderful manner about our path and about our bed, seeing and hearing all that we say and do. The chief way to become sensible of this, is of course attentive and frequent prayer. And any thing that humbles us in our own sight and in the sight of men, has also this effect; for the more we think of the eyes of men, the more we forget GOD'S presence. For this reason "confessing our sins" is called "glorifying GOD." And when the holy David would do honour to GOD, he laid himself open to be despised of men; saying to the reproaches of his wife, "I will yet be more vile than this, and will be base in mine own sight."

Now this subject—a habit of reverencing God—is so much more important than every other in the world, that our blessed LORD has placed it the very first in the prayer which He has given us: “Hallowed be Thy Name;” as if it were quite in vain and wrong to go on with that prayer unless we were reverencing His most holy and ever-adorable Name. And surely unless we do so use it, even of this Divine prayer it may be said, “The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.” To use the words only, without thinking of what we are doing, will make us worse than we were before; and therefore one of our LORD’s first cautions is, “Use not vain repetitions” when ye pray.

It is evident that, of all persons, those who are most in danger upon this subject are the Clergy; for they have more than others to live among holy things; and in every part of their calling, whether in speaking to others, or of ministering before God, they are peculiarly liable to irreverence; so that without care, they are likely to become, not better, but worse than others.. It was one out of that number, who were thus called upon to approach more nearly unto and to wait on their LORD, that Judas was found. This sin of irreverence is, perhaps, of all others, the worst, and approaches most nearly to the sin against the HOLY GHOST; for if a person has lost all reverence to God, he cannot recover it again, he cannot repent; for if he reveres not God, who can help him?

But though the Clergy are more especially in danger of this sin, yet doubtless there is *no one whatever* present among us but has great need to amend himself in this particular, lest God should be near him, as being ever present in his holy Church, and yet he know it not, like Judas, until God leaves him to himself, and he goes on, like that wretched man, to take part perhaps, either in private or in public, with the persecutors of God’s holy Church; or to be ensnared in some deadly sin.

Now if a habit of reverence is of so much importance, of course it cannot be acquired in a day, but must be a work of much pains and labour; but yet there is no day of our life but when we may make some advances towards obtaining such a spirit. People have sometimes found that a short and severe affliction has brought them more to a true sense of things than years would otherwise have done; and therefore, of course, any one sincere

and hearty effort may do much, by humbling ourselves and by earnest prayer, towards recovering a due sense of God's infinite perfections.

As the first petition in the LORD's Prayer is for this reverence in ourselves and others, so is the last an act of reverence, acknowledging that to HIM is "the kingdom, and the power, and the glory;" and which, as it suggests to us how impossible it is ever to escape from HIM, so would lead us also to trust in His infinite power to grant what we ask.

Let us endeavour more and more to have on our minds a sense of our blessed SAVIOUR's awful words: "I say unto you, my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; but I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear; fear HIM which, after HE hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear HIM."

Shall any Christian, however advanced, dare to think that he has not to learn this fear above all things? Even the saints in Heaven cry aloud, saying, "Great and marvellous are Thy works, LORD GOD ALMIGHTY; just and true are Thy ways, thou KING of Saints! Who shall not fear Thee, O LORD, and glorify Thy Name!"

SERMON CXII.

MEDITATION ON CHRIST'S PASSION.

Job. xlii. 5, 6.

"I have heard of THEE by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth THEE.

"Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

THESE words may, indeed, be applied to any manifestation of God to His sinful creatures; but with a peculiar force and propriety may we consider them as applicable to God "manifest in the flesh" in CHRIST Crucified. Nothing like the Cross of CHRIST, could ever teach us the great lessons of repentance and humiliation; never could the teaching of man, nor, indeed, could the words of Holy Scripture itself, ever set before us so strongly those two things, which we are so unwilling to learn,—the exceeding heinousness of sin in God's sight, and, at the same time, His tender love for the sinner. We have, indeed, heard of these "by the hearing of the ear," for the whole of the Scriptures, both old and new, do nothing but set before us these two great truths;—by warning, by example, by precept, by the history of terrible judgments, by instances and by expressions of inconceivable mercy;—but all these are comparatively cold and lifeless of themselves, compared with what it is when we, as it were, see in the flesh "CHRIST Crucified." Nothing, I say, like this can set before us these two points combined together, God's hatred of sin and love for mankind: other things might teach us

these separately, but then either of these separately would profit us but little without the other. The judgments of God,—the Day of the last account,—the worm that dieth not, and the fire that will never be quenched, these are things, the knowledge of which may, indeed, tend to show the heinousness of sin: but what would it avail us to know this only? it would only lead us to sit down in despair, unless we knew also that God had compassion for us in proportion to the greatness of our guilt in His sight. Or what would it profit us merely to know that God is Love, if we did not know also that He was of infinite holiness, and that He will by no means spare the guilty? we should only be tempted, as we too often are, to abuse His goodness, and to add sin to sin, and that, alas! too many of us without remorse.

Now, nothing, I say, could teach us these things like the Cross of CHRIST; and therefore it is that, if rightly understood, the Cross of CHRIST, to be brought to the knowledge of it,—to be made conformable unto it, may in some sense be said to be the whole of our religion: not, indeed, in that sense in which it is now often taken and preached, as implying nothing more than the forgiveness of sins in CHRIST; but as that one great principle which is most opposed to the world, “CHRIST Crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block and foolishness to the Greek.” The whole of Scripture may, indeed, be considered as all tending to bring us to this knowledge of the Cross of Christ, as implying the exceeding sinfulness of sin in God’s sight, and His love for the sinner. On the contrary, every thing that partakes of this world, and the inclinations of our own heart, all tend to take us further and further from this knowledge. And therefore, as this knowledge is the noblest and highest that Heaven itself is able to teach us, so we may well suppose it is the very hardest that man can learn. The only knowledge worth learning, and such as may well be the study of our whole lives.

Is it possible for any one to have too deep a sense of his own guilt in God’s sight? Certainly this cannot be: or is it possible for any one to have too high a sense of God’s loving kindness to himself in particular? Certainly not; neither of these can he ever feel enough. And how shall he learn these, but by every thing that leads him to the Cross of CHRIST. This our Church teaches us; for let me ask, Why is fasting and self-denial,

humiliation, and confession of sins, considered by our Church as so necessary through the season of Lent, and more especially through Passion Week, and, indeed, for a Christian at all times? Why does she set aside for these exercises in every week the solemn day of our LORD's sufferings? It is because they serve to bring us to this knowledge; it is because the sight of CHRIST's Cross will not profit us, but rather add to our condemnation, unless we thus prepare our hearts to approach it. Our daily prayer through the season of Lent is, that "worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, we may obtain perfect remission and forgiveness,"—that is, that we may thus, by these humiliations and mortifications of the spirit, come to that knowledge which is hid in CHRIST;—a knowledge of our own sins and wretchedness and a hope of forgiveness. These practices have an especial power in producing this state of mind: and whenever we cease from them, from practices of fasting and self-denial, then we begin immediately to think better of our condition in God's sight, to think not so bad of our sins, and therefore not so much to value that forgiveness for the penitent which is with God. Where is the great benefit of daily self-examination, of keeping a strict account with ourselves of time neglected, opportunities of good lost, of daily infirmities and failings, in thought, word, and deed? The more we do this, the more sensible we become of sin, the more sensible of God's Mercy: and therefore these things are the means that bring us near to the Cross of CHRIST. Or again, why are self-denials and mortifications of themselves unprofitable, unless they are accompanied with goodwill to man, and active means of doing good to our fellow-creatures? It is because, if not accompanied with these, they do not bring us unto the Cross of CHRIST. Such exercises, indeed, have, as it were, a natural connexion with CHRIST's Cross, so that what humbles ourselves after the example of CHRIST, makes us also, after His example, tender and compassionate to others; when we pray for ourselves, it disposes us to pray for others likewise; when it brings us to a sense of God's Mercy to ourselves, we feel that He has mercy, and that we also must have mercy for others also. Any doctrine of CHRIST Crucified which is not closely connected with these duties in ourselves, and these practices of self-denying charity to others, any doctrine which separates it

from these, is a false doctrine ; however flattering to men's indolence, however specious at first sight ; for Satan can, we know, transform himself into the appearance of an angel of light. And we may know it to be a false doctrine for this reason, whenever one part or doctrine of Scripture is so explained as to set aside, or put in the back ground, as not necessary to be insisted on, any other part, and any other truth, we may know that such doctrine is not rightly understood. Now we know that our SAVIOUR has declared, "whosoever doth not bear his Cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple." If, therefore, any one should teach us, that to deny ourselves daily, and bear our Cross, and all such duties of mortification are not necessary, if only we believe on CHRIST now or before our death, we may be sure that he does not rightly understand what it is to believe in CHRIST, or the doctrine of "CHRIST Crucified." Or again, Holy Scripture has declared "we must all appear before the judgment-seat of CHRIST, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." If, therefore, we suppose that because we believe in CHRIST's death and sufferings, therefore we shall not be called to a strict account of every thought, word, and action, that passes or has passed in this mortal life, and so set aside the terrors of that last Judgment ; then we may be sure that we are making some great and dangerous mistake in the matter, and do not rightly understand "CHRIST Crucified." Or again, our SAVIOUR has said, "blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven ;" and "blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see GOD:" if, therefore, we allow ourselves to think that we may love riches, or be impure in heart, and yet have a saving faith in CHRIST Crucified,—we quite mistake the whole matter.

Now it may be said that all this, considering how most persons live and die, is very fearful indeed ; and so doubtless it is : and does not the whole of Scripture throughout go upon the supposition, and declare it again and again, that our condition is a very fearful one ? It is the world only, and our own hearts, and all sin, and all self-indulgence, and all careless and inconsiderate living, which would persuade us of the contrary. In order to perceive this, let a man only consider how different his own views of this matter are, when he is humbled by any affliction,

or by fasting, to what they are, when he is prosperous in the world, and living at ease. In the former case, he thinks that the state of his own soul, and the most trivial matters with regard to it, are very serious and awful indeed, and he trembles for fear of God's judgment; that is to say, he sees something of the truth. But in the latter, in the midst of self-indulgence, he thinks that the matter is not so very awful, that "God is merciful," and that his condition is not so bad in God's sight as he before thought it was; he thinks his former fears were but vain fancies produced by low health and spirits; when, in fact, they were no less than the gracious visitations of the Holy Spirit, Who, whenever he is made conformable unto CHRIST's death, mercifully for His sake, reveals unto him something of God's holiness;—brings him as it were near unto HIM, and makes him, as we might say, to cry out with St. Peter, in the terror of God's presence, "depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O LORD." He feels his sinfulness, and therefore says, "depart from me;" though God's presence was to save him, he says, "depart from me;" he goes to the world, perhaps, in order to forget God's presence.

Now for all these half deceits which the world and the tempers of this world, both within us and without us, are ever busy to work in our minds, and for which they would, if possible, get even Holy Scripture to serve their purpose; for all these there is no cure so effectual as that of meditating seriously on the death and passion of our SAVIOUR CHRIST, and partaking of His Body and Blood. All other means are mainly useful in that they bring us to this, or are connected with it. Shall we think that the view we took of ourselves in sickness, or humiliation, was not the true one? On the contrary, what says Holy Scripture throughout of all approaches to CHRIST and His Cross? "Now mine eye seeth Thee, wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Whatever, therefore, most humbles us, and gives us low opinions of our own condition, brings us nearer to His Cross; whatever exalts and puffs us up with pride, puts us further from it: it is by seeing this that we come to have a right knowledge of ourselves. Let us consider also, how all the blessings which the Gospel holds out to faithful Christians, are connected with the Cross of CHRIST, and may be best attained by meditating on it. For instance, Scripture describes to us in

many ways, that the person who will be the highest in the kingdom of heaven, is he who will most humble himself here on earth. Now to do this, to practise this humility, what greater assistance and encouragement can we have than by thinking seriously of HIM, who was among His own disciples, "as he that serveth?" "Who being in the form of GOD, thought it not robbery to be equal with GOD; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon HIM the form of a servant,"—Who "humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross." Or if we consider the eight beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, how shall we better attain to the blessings that are there pronounced, than by meditating on the ALMIGHTY GOD manifested in JESUS CHRIST? First of all, "blessed are the poor in spirit," *i. e.* they who are indifferent to worldly advantages: where shall we better learn this heavenly temper of mind than by meditating on HIM, who had not where to lay His head, who for our sakes became poor, and chose that situation and condition of life which is most liable to contempt, and subjected Himself to the suffering and privations, such as the greatest poverty produces? This to a feeling and reflecting Christian, sanctifies and makes holy that condition of life more than any other; so that, deeply impressed with the example of His LORD, he would, if any thing, prefer such a state to any other; or, at all events, meditating on His SAVIOUR would lead more than any thing else to bring him to this mind; and this temper will doubtless receive the blessing of the poor in spirit, and be received into the kingdom. Or again, "blessed are the meek," *i. e.* they who suffer ill-treatment without anger; and surely if any thing can allay every angry feeling within our bosom, and teach us meekness, it is the CROSS and sufferings of HIM, "who when HE was reviled, reviled not again," who "gave His back to the smiters, and His cheek to them who plucked off the hair," when HE might have called legions of angels to His assistance, and destroyed them all "by one rough word." Or again, "blessed are they that mourn;" where shall we learn this blessed spirit of mourning over our own sins and those of our fellow Christians, but by considering to what an intensity of extreme agony they brought the SON of GOD, when HE cried out—"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me." If, therefore, the comforts

of CHRIST'S kingdom are to be given to this temper and state of mourning, let us not think of separating them, or suppose we shall obtain the benefits of His Cross without thus mourning with HIM: on the contrary, doubtless, the more we mourn, the more shall we be comforted. From this it arises, that they who fast most, and deny themselves, are usually the most cheerful and happy, being comforted of God; and are thus, as He promises, "rewarded openly" even in this world. Or again, "blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled;" where shall they be filled, or where shall they learn this hunger, but by desiring to be admitted, like the holy and most beloved St. John, into the judgment-hall with CHRIST, and to the foot of His Cross? How shall we dare to approach HIM excepting with these desires? What sin, what infirmity is there which we shall not earnestly lament which keeps us far from HIM: and of which HE bore the weight, which added to the sharpness of His sorrows? Surely there, if any where in this world, we shall hunger and thirst after righteousness; and by whom shall we be filled, but by HIM who hath said, "Come unto me, and learn of me?" Or, again, how shall we "see God" in JESUS CHRIST, unless we are "pure in heart?" They who harbour unlawful desires cannot see HIM, cannot have lot or part with HIM; but where shall we better learn purity than by meditating on His sufferings, for where is the sinfulness of impure thoughts written more fearfully? Where else can we obtain the blessing of "the peace-maker," and of them "who are persecuted for righteousness' sake?" The very prayers that the Church offers on Good Friday for "all estates of men," for "infidels, and heretics," proves, that if a desire of peace and the office of a peace-maker is to be learnt any where, it is at the Cross of Christ: and when persons have been persecuted, and suffered for righteousness' sake, their comfort has always been, they have been made "exceeding glad" when they have thought, like our own sacred martyr Charles the First, that they were being made like unto "CHRIST Crucified."

Such are the signs which break out even in this world of that great doctrine, which is higher than heaven above, and deeper than hell beneath, by which alone we obtain remission of our sins,—the doctrine of "CHRIST crucified." They who are "made

conformable'' unto it will so far receive the blessings of the kingdom, both now and hereafter; but they who are not, Scripture declares in many ways, will not be admitted into that kingdom. All things preach this doctrine to the eye and ear of faith: the disappointment, the vexation, the vanity, and heavy judgments attending all that is good in this world;—all the teachings of the Old Testament and of the New to the humble Christian are full of "CHRIST crucified;" but when JESUS CHRIST is HIMSELF brought before us on the Cross, it teaches us as none of these can do—"I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

SERMON CXIII.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

ST. LUKE x. 33, 34.

"But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was; and when he saw him he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine."

THE parable of the good Samaritan, who was so kind to his enemy the Jew, when he found him wounded and half dead, is in itself so interesting and so easy to be understood, that it is to be hoped that it is well known to every grown person and child among us. And perhaps there is no more sure and infallible sign of a true Christian, than, according to the injunction which our LORD adds to this parable, to be doing likewise, to keep this parable, and do good, not to friends only, but also to enemies; to put oneself to inconvenience, to be giving up time, spending money, and taking trouble, in order to do so. To be doing this is far better than any learning, it is the highest and best wisdom that any one can attain unto; for in fact, it is indeed nothing short of this,—it is being like unto JESUS CHRIST, it is being like unto GOD Himself.

And I suppose that no considerate person who has given his thoughts to this parable, has failed to observe that the conduct of the good Samaritan in this history, is precisely the same as that of our blessed SAVIOUR to us, Who, when we were enemies to Him by evil deeds, and had no one else to help us, "had com-

passion" on us ; it is, in fact, an exact description of His own conduct when manifested in the flesh.

Now this was very much observed by good men of old : they used to suppose that when God spoke, there were very great and Divine significations contained in His words ; so that besides the plain and simple meaning which all could understand, there were also deep and heavenly truths respecting CHRIST and His Church laid up in them. And there is much reason for supposing that the Apostles themselves led the early Christians to believe this. Now this parable is a remarkable instance of this kind ; for wise and good Bishops and Saints of God, living in different parts of the world, and in different ages, speaking different languages, and some very unlike each other in their ways of writing and thinking, yet very many¹ agree together in supposing that this parable, besides its plain meaning, does also contain within it an account of the dealings of JESUS CHRIST with mankind. Some of them indeed think that, in particular parts of it, it rather means one thing, and some that it rather means another. And probably they may be all in some degree right, and that it does contain many meanings in those places ; but all agree in this, that it does contain the history of our SAVIOUR and mankind.

It is in this sort of way they would explain it : they suppose that Jerusalem, that holy city upon the mountains, was no other than that place from which Adam and mankind had fallen,—the Paradise and the favour of God, and the light of his countenance ; and that the man who was going from thence to Jericho, was no other than lost mankind, who were going down to that city which is below, to Jericho, that city which lay under the curse of God, situated down in the valleys, descending from that Paradise into this world of woe,—this world of darkness and unceasing change. And the thieves into whose hands he fell, were no other than those evil spirits of darkness who stripped man of God's favour and protection, and wounded his soul so deeply, that he lay unable to help himself or to rise, and, as Scripture always describes, half dead, dead in trespasses and sins, which we are by nature ; cast out of the favour of God ; half

¹ Among these may be mentioned St. Irenæus, Origen, Ambrose, Augustin, Athanasius, Basil, Chrysostom, Theodoret, Gregory, Bede, and others, down to the late Bishop Jolly.

dead, being dead in the spirit, the better half. While mankind lay in this pitiable state, on the very edge of eternal death, there came by a Priest, and then a Levite, and both of them, when they saw, passed by unconcerned on the other side, and afforded him no assistance; and this has been thought to allude to the Law first and then to the Prophets, or to the moral and the ceremonial Law, or the Patriarchal and Levitical dispensations; neither of which could afford any help to lost mankind. But after they had passed by, "a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was, and when he saw him he had compassion on him." Here our blessed SAVIOUR takes to Himself that very name which the Jews applied to HIM in hatred and scorn; for as they hated nothing so much as a Samaritan, so in their anger they called HIM a Samaritan. HE therefore takes to Himself this evil name, and shows them that even as a Samaritan and outcast, as they considered HIM, HE was come near to them, having compassion on them, and seeing their helpless and lost condition. For indeed HE had *come near* to us, in putting on our human nature, and looked upon us with *human eyes of brotherly compassion* and sympathy, being, as HE likens Himself in His other parables, "as a man going a journey." "HE came where he was, and when HE saw him HE had compassion on him, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine." For has HE not indeed bound up our wounds, the wounds that our souls had received nigh unto death, from these evil spirits who have robbed us of Paradise, and left us half dead? And what is this oil but His gracious SPIRIT? and what is this wine but His Gospel and His Sacraments, which HE has poured into our wounds? For we know that throughout the whole of Scripture, the oil is put as an emblem or type of the HOLY SPIRIT; and wine, of the Blood of CHRIST, or of the Gospel. The Gospel is spoken of as that good wine which the heavenly Bridegroom has kept to the last. And thus has HE healed our wounds by His best gifts,—the oil of His SPIRIT, and the wine of His atoning Blood; and all the other medicines which HE, the great and good Physician, has to bestow.

It then proceeds: "And he put him on his own beast." HE Himself "*bore* our infirmities, and *carried* our sorrows;" HE Himself took upon HIM our human nature, that which is most

earthly and low in us, in order to carry us home with HIM; HE it is that has laid the lost sheep on His own shoulders, and carried it home rejoicing to His FATHER's fold. "And he took him to an inn and took care of him." And what is this inn but His own Church, in which HE has placed the wounded man, His enemy, and takes care of him? For the oil and wine would have profited him but little, if still left to himself unattended by the road-side. "And on the morrow when he departed;"—for our LORD had, after HE had established His Church, to return to Heaven,—at his departure, "he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him, and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again I will repay thee." And who is this host with whom our LORD has left the wounded man, but His own ministry, whom HE has appointed to preside in His Church? And the two pence which HE has put in his hands for the wants of the poor man, are, it is said, the two Testaments, the Old and New, which are stamped with the image and bear the inscription of our heavenly and eternal KING, Who has paid for us the price of His own Blood; or, as others would say, the two Sacraments which HE has left in His Church. But HE has not left us altogether; HE is that great Keeper whose eye neither slumbers nor sleeps: and a Samaritan signifies a keeper; for HE will come again and claim His wounded friend, and will reward His host who has taken care of him; as he says in other places, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his lord when he cometh, shall find so doing." Blessed indeed will that servant be! And his recompence HE describes by those gracious words which HE says HE shall speak unto his faithful minister: "Well done thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many, enter thou into the joy of thy LORD."

Now, by this account of this parable,—and I think we cannot fail to see that something of this kind is the true account of it, and of some mysterious history which it contains,—we may perceive, that when our LORD, by a simple and plain story, was teaching us how we are to act towards each other, the law and rule which HE gave us was none other than that by which HE

had Himself acted towards us. It is nothing else but a narrative of what HE has done. And to the whole of what has been said we may add, I think, our LORD'S words on another occasion, when HE washed His disciples' feet at the last supper: "After HE had taken His garments and was set down again, HE said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. *For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.*" And to which our Lord added, "if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." The same may be added to this parable of the good Samaritan: "I have give you an example that ye may do as I have done to you;" and "if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

Now there is nothing in Holy Scripture on which so great a stress is laid as works of mercy: it is this which is to be brought forward on the Day of Judgment, as that, upon which, more than any thing else, our eternal condition depends. And the reason perhaps is this, that nothing so answers on our part to that which JESUS CHRIST has done for us: it is the new and great law which proves more than any thing else whether we are sincere Christians; as our LORD Himself said, "a new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; *as I have loved you that ye also love one another.*" For the whole work of our redemption was on the part of our LORD a work of this lowly charity and compassion, like that of the good Samaritan,—a work which brought our blessed SAVIOUR down from heaven, to lift us up from our forlorn condition, and carry us home with HIM. In this chiefly of all His perfections are we called upon to imitate and follow HIM. HE was infinitely pure and just, infinitely temperate and courageous, as a most perfect pattern, and infinitely wise; but in none of these things are we so much called upon to follow HIM in the Gospels as in His mercy; and it is remarkable, that where in one Gospel we read, "be ye perfect, as your FATHER which is in Heaven is perfect," in the similar passage in another Gospel we read, "be ye merciful, even as your FATHER which is in Heaven is merciful;" as if the highest perfection in which we could resemble the ALMIGHTY was in mercy. We are not commanded to be wise as HE is, or to have such perfect courage as

HE had ; all these graces, indeed, we are to labour after, to learn patience of HIM, and to “purify ourselves as HE is pure ;” but I do not know that the example of our LORD is put before us, as the great object of our imitation, in any other respect *so much* as in mercy and lowly charity. The old law our LORD tells us was, “thou shalt love thy friend and hate thine enemy,” but His commandment is, “love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them which hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your FATHER which is in Heaven ; for HE maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.” And as St. John says, “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because HE laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him ?”

And it may be observed, that the Redemption of mankind—our being saved by the blood of CHRIST—does especially require these works of our hands ; it is only doing as we are done by ; it is only forgiving our fellow-servant a hundred pence after we have been ourselves forgiven a vast and immense sum, ten thousand talents of God. Our love is to be a sort of counterpart of CHRIST’s love to us, poor indeed at the best, but still a counterpart. For example, it is to our *enemies* that we are commanded to do good, for we were enemies to God through wicked works when CHRIST died for us. Again, it is not enough to wish them good, but we must *do* them good, for we should have utterly perished, if CHRIST had only wished for our good, and not taken the means to procure it. And we are to take trouble and pains to do good to others, for so did CHRIST for us ; we are to lower and humble ourselves in order to do them good, because CHRIST “being equal with God” humbled Himself so low, to take upon HIM the “form of a servant,” in order to do us good. We are to pray for others that ill use us, for our life consists in CHRIST’s interceding and praying for us, while we sin against HIM ; and the beloved Apostle carries it even further than this, by saying, that as CHRIST “laid down His life for us, so ought we to lay down our lives for the brethren.” This compassion and charity must indeed be practised by every one who hopes to be saved ; and

every one may find opportunities and means to practise it in every situation of life in some manner ; every one has some one to whom he may be kind and show mercy ; every one has some opportunity of doing so. But of course some much more so than others : “ as the body has many members,” and these members have different offices, so is it with the Church of God, different persons have different duties which God has set them, and different things HE requires of them ; and in the performance of each of these, men may be equally accepted of HIM, if they faithfully perform that part which HE has assigned them. But at the same time it must be confessed that they whose occupation and business in life most of all requires of them to attend to the wants, both spiritual and bodily, of others, may most of all resemble the life of JESUS CHRIST ; and therefore their life upon earth is the highest and best of all lives, that which a good man would most desire, if it were in his power to choose ; for almost all that is recorded of our SAVIOUR’S life is of this kind : all His works are works of compassionate kindness.

How often is *compassionate pity* mentioned of HIM like to that which the text speaks of in the good Samaritan, who, when he saw the wounded man, came to him and looked on him, and had *compassion*. In the lesson, for instance, for to-day, we read that when our LORD returned into the wilderness to be alone,—for they had not leisure even so much as to eat bread,—yet when they followed HIM there from their cities, yet, forgetful of Himself and of His own wants, we read, “ Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was *moved with compassion* towards them, and HE healed their sick.” And at another time we read, “ Then JESUS called His disciples unto HIM, and said, *I have compassion* on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days and have nothing to eat ; and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way.” And at another time we read of His “ *having compassion*” on the multitude, because “ they were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd.” And in another place, that HE “ *had compassion*” on the poor widow who had lost her child. Who does not in all these things see the good Samaritan, who “ as he journeyed, came where the wounded man was, and *had compassion on him* ?”

And at another time, when HE saw the rich young man whom

HE in vain attempted to serve, HE looked upon him with this same pity and tenderness ; it is said JESUS "loved him." And at the grave of Lazarus, when HE saw the relatives of the dead man in affliction, HE was moved even to tears, though HE knew HE could restore him to them. And in like manner, when HE approached the city of Jerusalem at the great Feast, and all around HIM were rejoicing, "HE wept over it," beholding at a distance the calamities which were coming upon it: "And when HE was come near, HE beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace ; but now they are hid from thine eyes." And no less pitiful and compassionate were our LORD's parting words when HE left the temple for the last time : "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not."

So that not only in the great work of our Redemption throughout does our LORD show Himself the good Samaritan, whom HE has described, but even as the SON OF MAN upon earth did HE ever seem to be full of this human compassion ; and when the hard-hearted Pharisees were angry at His healing an afflicted man on the Sabbath-day, HE likened the poor man's case to that of one who "had fallen into a pit" and had none to help him, like the case of the wounded man in the parable : "And HE said unto them, What man shall there be among you that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath-day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep!" Thus did HE look upon suffering mankind as a brute creature fallen and helpless ; but yet in His tenderness HE would not have him considered as a brute animal, but adds, "how much is a man better than a sheep!"

And moreover we may observe, that although all our LORD's unwearied teaching was directed to the healing of men's souls, to the recovery of their immortal and better part, yet how very much compassion did HE ever show to the wants of their bodies also ! Whatever their diseases were HE removed them ; and even at the sight of the people who were hungry and weary "HE was moved with compassion;" and those that were more helpless

than others, such as little children, HE took up in His arms. Thus in His great kindness and gentleness to the bodies of men, HE was indeed the good Shepherd, who “carries the lambs in His arms, and gently leads those that are with young.”

But although our LORD’s own time during His ministry was spent in teaching and preaching, as well as in healing and working miracles, yet in the commands HE has given to all Christians, it is to be observed that HE does not say *so much* about converting and teaching the ignorant and thoughtless, as HE does about kindness to the bodily wants and distresses of others. His words on the last Day will be, “I was an hungered and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger and ye took me in; naked and ye clothed me; I was sick and ye visited me; I was in prison and ye came unto me.” Nothing is said of teaching the ignorant, or of preaching the Gospel, or of converting the impenitent, in this blessed catalogue of those good deeds which HE will remember at last. And the reason may be, that instructions of this kind our LORD seems to have confined more particularly to His Apostles, and the Seventy Disciples whom HE appointed and sent forth,—those servants whom HE set over His household “to give them their meat in due season:” to them HE speaks especially of bringing people to faith and repentance; and woe unto them if they do it not! But to Christians in general HE says comparatively little about converting others, but gives them very strict laws of holy living, of mercy, and charity; and adds, “let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your FATHER which is in Heaven.” This is, I think, very much to be observed, because in the present day some people are apt to become impatient, if they are not engaged directly in teaching religion and in converting mankind; whereas it is very likely that their own hearts need conversion, and that they would do more to win others to religion by amending their own lives, by works of mercy, and forgiveness of injuries, than they could do by any other means. It is impossible for any one to practise these works of mercy, and even to be engaged in the work of the good Samaritan, but that he must win the souls of others, and “convert many to righteousness.” If, in short, he will take care and amend his own heart the fruit will be good: it will shew itself in words and actions;

for "from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." His words and actions will be sanctified by the HOLY SPIRIT, so as to minister light to others.

It is of course far, very far, greater and better to do good to the souls of our brethren than to their bodies ; but this is so great a work, that the good SPIRIT alone can do it, by His own appointed means ; and perhaps one of His chief means of doing it is by the example of good people who show mercy.

And therefore it may be, that little or nothing is said of men being condemned on the Judgment-day for not converting others. On the contrary, they who are condemned are spoken of as coming forward and saying, that they "have prophesied," or preached, in CHRIST'S Name, and "in His Name done many wonderful things." But this claim of theirs HE will not allow, but will condemn them, because they *have not done works of mercy*. And on many other occasions, it may be noticed in Scripture, that it is kindness to the bodily wants of men that is most particularly enjoined, such as is contained in these commands : "If any would have thee go with him a mile, go with him twain." "Sell that ye have, and give alms ; provide yourselves bags that wax not old, a treasure in the Heavens that faileth not." "Verily, a cup of cold water given in My Name shall not lose its reward." And many other injunctions are there of this kind. In like manner, the actions that are commended of CHRIST in the Gospel, are not, that I know, in any instance, those of converting others, but those which prove our own conversion. Such was the widow's mite, who "gave all that she had for God's service." Such was the good Mary, who sat earnestly listening to our LORD'S discourses, having "chosen that good part which should never be taken from her." Such was Zaccheus, who gave half his goods to feed the poor, and made restitution fourfold. And so also the actions that are condemned in the Gospels are not an indifference to the souls of men, but to their bodily wants ; as, for instance, the rich man who would not give to Lazarus of the crumbs that fell from his table ; the wicked servant in the parable, that would not forgive his fellow-servant ; and the hard-hearted Pharisee, who oppressed the widow and made a show of religion. And the descriptions of true religion in the Gospels, almost all relate to doing works of mercy ourselves, rather than that of preaching

them to others; as, for instance, that law which our LORD especially brought out of the Old Testament: "What else does the LORD thy GOD require of thee, but to do judgment and love mercy?" Such again is St. James's description: "True religion and undefiled before GOD and the FATHER is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

And perhaps one great reason for all this may be, that these works are in the power of all; every one can show compassionate attention to the temporal wants of others. But as to any thing more than this, "it cost more to redeem their souls, so that he must let that alone for ever." And besides which, it is, as I said before, probably the way of GOD by which HE wins and converts souls. A good man must, as our Lord has told us, be hated by the world, for he is a witness against it; he must be hated excepting for his works of meekness, kindness, and mercy. But these works of charity drew to him especially the love of others; and by these means their natural hatred of what is good is overcome; and when they love a man who is kind and merciful to them, they begin also to love that goodness which is the source of his actions. Thus unawares and, as it were, against their wills, they are won over to the truth: they love good men because they are kind to them, and then they come to love goodness itself. This is perhaps very much the case now in whatever good is done in the world, as it was the case in our Lord's history; for those who were most of all gained over to His teaching, were those who witnessed His works of mercy, or derived benefit from them. While others reviled and hated HIM, those whom HE had saved from distress or death, could not surely but look with love and reverence on their Deliverer; their hearts were opened by His works of mercy to receive His words.

In conclusion, it may be observed, that as the day of Judgment will take in the whole of our lives, therefore we must not think that one or two acts of mercy in our past lives will be enough to stand the trial of that awful day; but it must be the work of our whole lives. Every day should be considered as lost in which we do not do some act of mercy: and therefore perhaps it is, that our LORD has specified acts of mercy of every kind, so that none may be omitted; that if one falls not in our way, we may

do another. And for the same reason, HE has mentioned actions the most small and trifling; saying of them, that they “verily shall receive a reward.” And when HE added to this parable, “Go and do thou likewise,” HE did not surely mean once only, as if it were a great matter; but that it was the rule of His religion,—that it may be practised at all times.

Let us therefore not hear in vain, but labour so to act, that we may have comfort in the hour of death and in the day of Judgment.

SERMON CXIV.

TRUE LOVE EXEMPLIFIED.

MATT. xxii. 37, 38.

“JESUS saith unto him, Thou shalt love the LORD thy GOD with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.”

WHATEVER great doctrine, great principle, or duty, Holy Scripture requires of us, is generally found in various shapes throughout the whole of it: in precepts, in prophecies, in parables, and also in living examples. And such we find to be the case with this great duty of love or charity; and I would consider it to-day as set before us in an example of a man like ourselves; for so shall we combine two great subjects which are suitable to this day.

Love of GOD is the very perfection of man, it is the crown of all goodness, containing within it every duty and every blessing. We may, therefore, have well expected to find it set before us in that person who seems to hold the highest place in God's favour; and such, surely, was St. John, the beloved disciple. For if love is the highest and best of all things, we may reasonably suppose it will be seen in him who is most perfect.

And now, I think, it is the case, that although we know but little of St. John's life and history, yet in what we do know, we shall find, that almost all the descriptions of Divine love, which are scattered throughout Holy Scripture, may be perceived to be applicable to some point in his life and character.

Now the first thing required before we can attain unto Divine

love is repentance. This St. John himself repeatedly assures us ; “ Whosoever abideth in HIM sinneth not ; whosoever sinneth hath not seen HIM, neither known HIM.” Every one, therefore, who would love GOD, must put away all sin, and be recovered by repentance. This is the first step towards the love of GOD. Now the first place where we meet with the beloved St. John in Holy Scripture is as a disciple of John the Baptist. He appears to be one of those two disciples to whom the Baptist pointed out the LAMB of GOD. The whole teaching of the Baptist was contained in one word, repentance ; to be a disciple, therefore, of St. John the Baptist was to be a disciple of repentance : and these two disciples, to whom St. John the Baptist pointed out CHRIST, must have been highly favoured disciples, must have been remarkable for their repentance above all His disciples ; and, therefore, most meet and fitted to behold CHRIST. Such was St. John the Evangelist on the first mention that occurs of him.

The next thing requisite for Divine love is to renounce the love of all other things ; in order to love GOD alone ; as our LORD HIMSELF said, “ he that loveth father or mother more than ME is not worthy of ME ; and he that loveth son or daughter more than ME is not worthy of ME :” and “ whosoever he be that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be MY disciple.” All these things were fulfilled in the next act which we read in St. John’s life, when he was called upon to be a disciple, of which we have the following account. “ JESUS saw two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and HE called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed HIM.” Here St. John, at CHRIST’s bidding, leaves his father and the comforts of a home, and “ all that he hath,” for he gives up the very means of his livelihood ; and those who do these things CHRIST had promised to love, and to be to them as a near relative : and when he wished to prove the rich young man recorded in the Gospels, HE told him to sell all that he had, and give to the poor, and to follow HIM. St. John, therefore, had now put himself in the place of one who would attain Divine love : he had now taken those two great steps which are the most difficult of all, first of all by repentance, then by giving up all that he had. He had already passed through the narrow gate, which leads to the

attainment of Divine love. And as our LORD had also spoken of "hating wife and children" in comparison with the love of HIM, this also was fulfilled in St. John, for he lived unmarried all his days; and this we may reasonably suppose was, because his whole soul had become so entirely absorbed in the love of GOD; and that he abstained, as much as he could, from too strong earthly affection, in order that he might give himself up more entirely to the love of CHRIST.

Now the general proofs of the love of GOD which Holy Scripture always sets before us, are such as indicate the love of our neighbour: "he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love GOD whom he hath not seen?" And it is very evident that St. John had in a very pre-eminent and remarkable degree the love of mankind. Every thing that he has written breathes of this love; his ways of speaking are marked with a simple and tender affection: his mode of addressing all Christians shows this, calling them "little children," or "beloved," or "fathers," and the like. And, indeed, he was so well known for this love of Christians, that his character is thought to be well shown in that saying which is recorded of him, that when too old and infirm to say anything else, he kept repeating the words, "little children, love one another." And as from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, we may be sure that St. John had in a very pre-eminent degree that love of our neighbour, without which there cannot be the love of GOD.

But besides this general account contained in the love of our neighbour, St. Paul has given us a particular description of many things in which this Divine love shows itself, in that account which he has given us of Charity. Now even in the little which is recorded of St. John's history we shall find sufficient indications on all these points:

"Love envieth not," or hath no emulation. Now this we find was exactly the case with St. John; so much so, that though our LORD loved him most of all his disciples, in return, we may suppose, for his love of his LORD, yet we may observe that St. John gave up the chief place and authority to his own friend, the great and good St. Peter. For it would appear that St. Peter was first in authority among the disciples; St. John first in the love of his Master. And yet his own relations,

probably, thought that he ought to have had the first place in authority; for we read that his mother, the wife of Zebedee, came with her two sons, asking that her two sons might sit, the one on our LORD's right hand, and the other on His left in His kingdom.

Again, St. Paul says, "love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up." Now this we find in St. John; so much so, that although he was the most favoured and exalted of all the children of Adam, by being "the disciple whom JESUS loved," yet no word of presumption ever escaped his lips. He makes, indeed, no professions, no promises of love and fidelity. Whereas, even the zealous and faithful St. Peter seems to have done this: three times did he declare, that although all men should deny his LORD, yet he never would do so: presuming, as it would seem, too much on his own strength, and thereby putting himself in some degree before the other disciples; to which our LORD seems to allude, when afterwards, in His kind reproof, HE said unto him, "lovest thou ME more than these?" Whereas St. John, on this point, especially exemplified his own account of true love, "my little children," he says, "let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth."

At the same time, St. John also showed another proof of Divine love which St. Paul mentions, "love is not easily provoked"—"beareth all things." When the wicked traitor with his company came to lay violent hands on the holy LAMB of GOD; this was, indeed, to the disciples a great trial of patience; for it would have been far more easy to have endured violence and insult offered to oneself than to so holy and meek a Master; and St. Peter drew his sword in His defence. But St. John, in the greatness of his Divine love, perceived that CHRIST was the Almighty Power of GOD, who by one rough word could have overwhelmed His enemies in destruction; and, therefore, he was not "provoked," nor behaved himself "unseemly," or in a manner unbecoming so Divine a Master, but observed, probably, at the time, that which he mentions in his Gospel as a proof of Divine power,—that when our Lord spoke the word, "I am He," "they fell to the ground." And thus "he endured," in JESUS CHRIST "seeing HIM that is invisible." And then, again, we behold in him throughout that love which

“endureth all things, beareth all things,” or, as it might be translated, “is proof against all things,” and that, too, “not in word, or in tongue, but in deed and in truth:” so quiet, so unpretending, that the world might have never heard of his fidelity but for an almost accidental mention of it: by which we find that in the hall of Caiaphas, when St. Peter was so overwhelmed with fear as to deny his LORD, yet St. John, also, was present throughout; and yet “endured all things.” And then, again, at the foot of the Cross, regardless of all the mockery and insults of the soldiers, we find St. John supporting our LORD’s afflicted mother: surely, never was there set so strongly before all the world a picture of that which St. Paul describes as the first mark of genuine love, “Charity suffereth long and is kind.” And here did he receive that which to Divine love would be the greatest of earthly rewards; for as he had left his own relations to follow CHRIST, he had committed to his charge by CHRIST HIMSELF His own mother, the most “blessed among women.” Surely, we may well suppose that no home was ever so holy, so much the resort of blessed angels, as that in which the holy mother and the beloved disciple dwelt together. This was love which was “proof against all things;” which was not tempted by the highest privileges and honours, nor by the greatest calamities and provocations, to “behave” itself “unseemly.” For the love of God is the only foundation for true humility, so as not to be “puffed up;” and the only foundation for true courage, so as to “bear all things.”

And again, St. Paul says, “love believeth all things, hopeth all things:” and where shall we find a more remarkable instance of this than in St. John at our LORD’s Resurrection? Our LORD did not manifest Himself to the beloved disciple, because he needed no manifestation; but when he saw the empty grave and the clothes wrapped up with no signs of haste, he at once believed; and thereby obtained that greater blessing of which our LORD spake when HE said, “blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed.” Thus throughout in the heavenly calmness of St. John’s character, in the hall of Caiaphas, at the foot of the Cross, and at the grave of CHRIST, do we see before our eyes in a human example that charity which “beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.” Here we may observe

an explanation of his own words when he says, "perfect love casteth out fear;" for where can we find one more perfectly fearless in all things than this Divine Apostle? how did he act up to our LORD's words, "fear not them which kill the body, and after that have no more than they can do."

But still this love of St. John was accompanied with a very great fear of GOD, whom our LORD so strongly commanded to fear above all things. "Fear HIM," HE repeated, "yea, I say unto you, fear HIM." And it is written, "blessed is the man that feareth always." Thus when our LORD showed Himself to them after His Resurrection, at the lake of Gennesareth, and ate with them, they were so filled with awful reverence at His presence, that it is said, "no one of them dared to ask HIM, Who art Thou? knowing that it was the LORD." And when St. John gives the account of our LORD appearing to him in the book of Revelation, he says, "And when I saw HIM, I fell at His feet as dead."

And yet, notwithstanding this holy fear, he so longed for CHRIST's coming, that when our LORD said, "surely I come quickly:" he ventured to add,—no doubt from the depth of his heart,—"even so, come, LORD JESUS!" And not in word but in deed did he evince this, when he showed himself willing to die as a martyr, and was saved, it is said, by a miracle. And—desirous as he was to meet his LORD,—when he was exposed on a desert island, for the testimony of JESUS CHRIST, he was suffering more for the truth's sake than he would have done by immediate death.

Again, other proofs of this Divine love, such as St. Paul describes, may be found not only in the actions, but also in the writings of the beloved disciple. Thus it is said, charity "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth?" This is ever seen in this Apostle, "I rejoiced greatly," he says, "that I found of thy children walking in truth:" and in another letter," "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." It may be fully seen that nothing in this world so much gladdened his heart as to know of men walking in the truth. And so also is the other part of the sentence equally fulfilled in St. John, that charity, "rejoices not in iniquity," *i. e.* is pained and grieved at it, and hates it; for that is not true love which does not hate ini-

quity. Thus we find that no one more strongly inveighs against all maintainers of false doctrine; thus "if any man come unto you," he says, "and bring not this doctrine" of CHRIST, "receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed." And of Diotrophes, "who loved to have the pre-eminence," he said, that in coming he would remember his deeds. Nor has any Evangelist left on record so clear and full account of the wickedness of Judas Iscariot as the disciple of Divine love. It is also, we know, reported of him, that when he heard that a heretic was in the place where he was, he immediately rushed out with horror and dismay. And now all these circumstances of holy zeal, which we find in St. John's character, will explain to us what St. Paul means by that expression, charity "rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth."

In short, this holy Apostle, from the greatness of his love, seemed to be already walking in heaven, his conversation was in heaven. When we love any one very much, and our thoughts are ever with him, and in the place where he is, we seem to be almost there ourselves: for our minds are already there. Where our treasure is, there will our hearts be. And thus, like faithful Abraham, he seemed to be indifferent to all earthly things, and to walk above earth: and like that other "man of loves," in the Old Testament, the prophet Daniel, it was given him to see deeply into the things of heaven and the things of futurity. These three holy men, Abraham, Daniel, and St. John, God made in an especial manner His friends, and imparted unto them His secrets. "Henceforth I call you not servants, but I call you friends, for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth."

And therefore it is that when St. John speaks, it is like a voice speaking from Heaven,—there is no beautiful composition, few human incidents, or engaging parables, but it is like a heavenly voice ever speaking of Divine love. He seems to forget earthly things; and when he speaks of CHRIST he speaks not, as others, of the Son of Man, but of the SON of GOD;—not of the helpless child at Bethlehem, nor of the agonies of the Son of Man in the garden of Gethsemane, but of things heavenly and Divine, of the true Light, and of HIM in Whom is life; of the Bread that came down from Heaven; and the living Water, and HIM Who is Himself, the Resurrection. He uses these words to express our

LORD's unspeakable and hidden Godhead: it was with him as with St. Paul, when he says, "though we have known CHRIST after the flesh, yet henceforth know we HIM no more,"—"old things are passed away—behold, all things are become new."

To conclude, from these observations on St. John it is evident that when our LORD enjoins this great commandment, of loving God with all our heart, and soul, and strength, HE does not command us more than we are able to perform, and more than others have attained to. And if others have done so—if St. John has fulfilled this great law of charity—then we also are able to do so: for we know that the beloved disciple was not thus perfected by his own strength, but entirely by the Grace of God enabling him both to will and to do. And God is "no respecter of persons," HE will give the same grace to any one of us, who will take the same pains that he did to obtain it. We may be sure that St. John had the same temptations to struggle with that we have, the same evil dispositions to overcome; and he did overcome, and was more than Conqueror through HIM that loved him. It might have been otherwise—he might have neglected the means of grace: we may well believe that he might have fallen off more and more, until he had betrayed his LORD, like the traitor Judas. And, indeed, the traitor might, if he had chosen, have attained unto this Divine love which St. John had, if he had made the same use of the same opportunities. It has been supposed by some great writers of old, that it was only latterly that Judas became so lost to all amendment; that he had been once good and faithful, and on the way to become highly esteemed as a disciple of CHRIST. And it may be observed, that the Psalmist speaks of him in the person of CHRIST, as "mine own familiar friend whom I trusted." "We took sweet counsel together, and walked in the house of GOD as friends;" but "he left off to behave himself wisely, and to do good:" and oh! how altered did he become in a short time; he who had been lifted up to Heaven, became the child of the devil, and chose his portion of misery with evil spirits, instead of being the most favoured of GOD's children.

Would that we were as wise in judging of our own condition as we are in judging of that of others, that we would but see in our own case that folly which we see in the case of others!

These two disciples we are speaking of were called to the great privilege of attending upon CHRIST, of hearing His gracious words, and partaking of His ALMIGHTY help. And surely we are called to a blessing no less than this, when we are called to the unspeakable privilege of loving God. That we should be allowed to do so—that we should be permitted to love Him who is so infinitely good! surely words cannot speak the greatness of this favour. That there should be no limits or bounds set to this, but that we should be allowed to love Him with all our heart, and soul, and strength; and not only allowed, but commanded to do so: and also that HE who commands should give us the power to perform! if after this we fix our hearts on things below in this our time of trial, then surely, in the eyes of the Holy Angels of God, our conduct must appear as inexcusable as that of Judas, who for thirty pieces of silver sold the LORD of life, and forfeited Heaven.

And, indeed, even now it is very easy to see all this; it is easy to see the vast difference between the love of God, and the love of every thing else; but we are satisfied with seeing this: and still, after all, we are, for the most part, in the same place, and have done nothing towards the attainment of it: we let day pass after day, and year after year, till suddenly death stares us in the face, and makes us look more closely on our own folly, when it is too late to amend it.

And the reason of all this may be comprised in one short saying—because we say and do not—or because we hear and do not.

The road to destruction is paved with fine sayings, and great intentions, and feelings of good; or else there would not be so many that travel along the broad road, as our blessed LORD says there are, for “many are they who go in thereat.”

The road to Heaven is paved with good works alone.

Blessed and Divine Lesson—let us unlearn all other things, that we may learn it! Privilege unspeakable, and consummation of all joy; let us value nothing else, in order that we may value this alone; let us care for nothing else, that we may be exceeding careful of this; for Heaven and earth and all things else shall pass away, but Divine Love shall alone remain. “I am always

by THEE, THOU hast holden me by my right-hand." "Whom have I in Heaven but THEE? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of THEE!" "My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever!" "I will behold Thy presence in righteousness, and when I wake up after Thy likeness I shall be satisfied with it."

SERMON CXV.

HOLY CHILDHOOD.

ST. LUKE ii. 40.

“And the Child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him.”

VERY little is told us of our blessed LORD for all the early years of His life, from infancy to manhood. Once only does HE come before the eyes of mankind; it is when HE was twelve years of age, when HE was lost by His parents, and found in the temple. The description of His early age is contained in a few words, that HE “was subject to” His parents;—which doubtless signifies that HE was in an extraordinary manner a pattern of filial obedience:—and that HE “grew in wisdom and in stature;” in stature like other children; in wisdom, such as made HIM in the highest degree accepted of GOD, Who testified at His Baptism, saying, “This is my beloved SON, in Whom I am well pleased.” And such HE grew as a child, “in favour both with GOD and man.”

In the eyes of men HE was but as other children: in the eyes of GOD, Who was tenderly watching over HIM, HE grew in favour as the SON of man, increasing day by day in perfect holiness. Man knew HIM not; but doubtless the angels of heaven, who had sung His birth, never ceased to attend upon HIM in wonder and adoration; while as a poor child He was subject to poor parents, and daily becoming more and more acquainted with human sorrows. But beyond what is written, no thought of man can conceive worthily of that Divine Childhood.

Next to the childhood of our LORD Himself, we are inclined to look to the childhood of other saints of GOD in Scripture, such as the holy child Samuel, who also, like our blessed LORD Himself, only appears to us when a child in the temple of GOD; as if the temple of GOD was the only place for a child. But we look especially to the children mentioned in the Gospels, to learn what is said of them as they came near to the Person of our blessed LORD. And now we find this circumstance, (and blessed be GOD for it!) that full as is every page of the Gospel with the wickedness of men, yet no bad word and no wicked deed is recorded of any child against CHRIST. And moreover, when men were forward to follow HIM, and made professions of zeal in serving HIM, HE put them back with awful warnings, speaking to them of "taking up the cross," and of first "counting the cost;" but not so with children; HE drew them unto HIM with unrestrained affection, and bowels of compassion yearning over them: we behold HIM taking them up in His arms, and with His hands upon them. And they alone of all mankind returned His affectionate care without alloy; for we find them in the temple celebrating His praise, when the Priests and Scribes were angry with them, as they heard them crying Hosannah to the Son of David. The children, indeed, understood not what was the meaning of those glorious words which they sung; but to our LORD it was the most acceptable offering of praise that HE received, for HE defended them, and said, "Have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise?" This was the praise which best spoke the nature of His kingdom: these were the songs that were most suitable to His temple: these Hosannahs of the children were not followed the next day with cries of "crucify HIM," like the Hosannahs of the multitude were. And as we find holy childhood in GOD's temple on earth, and children in the temple singing His praise: so also in His temple in heaven they sing the new song before the throne, "These are they which were not defiled with women: for they are virgins. These are they which follow the LAMB whithersoever HE goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto GOD and to the LAMB. And in their mouth was found no guile, for they are without fault before the throne of GOD."

If we inquire on what other occasions children are mentioned

in the Gospels as finding access to CHRIST, or spoken of in relation to HIM, we shall find them as partaking of His sufferings: "For this also is a high privilege," as St. Paul says, "unto you is given not only to believe in HIM, but also to suffer for His sake." Such were those holy innocents which were slain at Bethlehem, the first of Martyrs—Martyrs not in will, but in deed. And other children also are mentioned in the Gospels as sufferers; not sufferers indeed for His Name's sake, but brought near unto HIM by suffering; such were those who were healed by HIM, as that youth who was possessed by a devil, grievously tormented, and cast by him into the fire and water, and that daughter of the Ruler, twelve years of age, sick of a fever, on whom our LORD laid His hand, and raised her from the dead.

But far more than this has our LORD done to dignify and exalt the state of childhood, by telling us more than once, that we must become like little children in order to enter into the Kingdom; and that he who humbles himself most as a little child, shall be the highest in that Kingdom. All true greatness, therefore, consists in being like a child. Now this not only sets before us the pattern and description of what we ought to be: but raises the state of childhood in men's eyes: for we naturally reverence and respect, and think highly of that which we are desirous to imitate. It makes childhood precious in the eyes of a good man: and also it checks all thoughts of pride in the most perfect, to be taught that HE who would learn perfection in the school of CHRIST, has still to go back, and to learn of a child.

Now we cannot understand the full meaning of any of our LORD's words, for they are higher than heaven, and we are on earth; they are Divine words, and Angels desire to look into them: but though we cannot understand them altogether, yet we can always by GOD's gracious help comprehend a great deal, which, if we follow it, will lead to our everlasting good. We cannot fully therefore understand, in what sense the most perfect must be as children; must go back to that childhood they have lost. But though we cannot understand it fully, yet we can in great measure. For instance, children have no worldly possessions; and he is the best Christian who is most disengaged from them: who even "in possessing" is, as St. Paul said, "as if he possessed not." In like manner we may observe, that to be "poor in spirit," that is to

say, to be indifferent about wealth, is the temper of mind which has annexed to it the first blessing pronounced in the Gospel ; it is the first thing required, in order to enter into the Kingdom of heaven. And persons in the Gospels were sometimes commanded and encouraged to give up their worldly possessions, in order to obtain this perfection ; as our Lord said to the rich young man, " If thou wouldst be perfect, sell that thou hast and give to the poor." Now this was very generally practised by the early Christians, so that the most eminent Saints and Martyrs of God were in this respect like children, that they had no worldly possessions to occupy their thoughts. And there has been a practice in some Churches for men and women to relinquish all their property, and live together in societies ; where all that was needful was provided for them, without any anxious concern of theirs ; and thus they came to this state and this circumstance of childhood, that it is free from worldly cares.

There are many other points in which the condition of a child is like that of the most perfect Christian. A child is necessarily free from many bad passions, which are common among men, but which the good Christian knows not, such as sins of impurity. It is that one thing in which the Christian state is mentioned by our blessed Lord as being like that of Angels, when HE says, that they " shall be equal to the Angels " of God hereafter ; the point of resemblance which HE mentions, has respect to this child-like innocence and purity. It is in this point the most perfect Christians are like the Angels of God, and like little children.

Again, there are many things in the state of children, that make childhood to be the very pattern and example of humility. A child has to *look up* for every thing, and can look down on none. And this is the state of the best Christian, to be *looking up* always, and to look down upon none ; to be ever *looking up* to his FATHER which is in heaven, and ever esteeming others better than himself. A child has to depend on others for what he wants, to be supported day by day without any care for the morrow. And this is the state of faith,—a perfect reliance on God's Providence day by day, casting " all our care upon HIM, for HE careth for us : " this is the frame of mind that we have all to seek more and more. Again, children are subject to keen pains and sorrows, and yet

are for the most part usually full of hope and cheerfulness; their tears are soon forgotten and pass away; and this is the rule that St. Paul gives for the Christian, that he should be "in weeping as if he wept not, and rejoicing as if he rejoiced not." Again, childhood is especially the season of hope: whatever occurs to them of evil, the hopes of children are still lively and strong; and hope is one of the highest of Christian graces found in the perfect Christian. What St. Paul says of charity is in some sense true of childhood also, that it "hopeth all things, believeth all things." Children have not yet learned to distrust mankind, and have no conflicting interests to occasion envy and ill-will, and therefore their hearts are more open to love. Children have ever to learn from others, to lean upon others, to gain every thing they enjoy or know from others, and therefore childhood is also the season of faith. They are obliged to live by faith, to take things upon trust, and the more they do so the better they are.

Now we have all in these things to learn of children, and to be like them in the Kingdom of God: not to lean on our own understandings, but more and more to depend upon God; not to entertain anxious thought for the morrow; to avoid as far as we can all suspicion and distrust of others, for it is far better to be deceived sometimes than to be always distrustful; but above all things, to learn of them that humility which exalts in the sight of God and good Angels, and that purity of heart without which no one shall see the Lord.

There is another point of view in which childhood is to be considered. Childhood is the period of painful training, of discipline and schooling, not of self-will and self-indulgence. It is not only subject to all those natural evils and pains which we inherit from our first parents, those many bodily sicknesses and sufferings of mind which childhood is especially liable to; but our early years must be given up to laborious care and study, or we shall be ignorant and useless for the rest of our lives. We must be put under restraint, as children, if we would not be utterly lost as men; we must be kept to things which are most contrary to our natural inclinations; our desires must be checked, and many things denied them which they are most earnestly bent on. Children must be ever kept under control; and such control is not pleasing but grievous.

And this also is the state of the good Christian ; for, besides all those evils which he is subject to as a child of Adam, he is always schooling and disciplining himself, going contrary to his own inclinations and desires. His happiness is, indeed, far greater on this account ; his hope of Heaven is more lively ; his faith more perfected ; and his charity increased, by all this course of self-denial : in like manner, children are indeed far more happy for the restraint and training which they are obliged to submit to, and, upon the whole, more cheerful than they would be if left to self-indulgence and idleness. But still this matters not ; they must be seasons of discipline to both : without training and care and study in youth, manhood is lost ; and without care and training and discipline to the Christian, Heaven is lost and forfeited. Thus childhood is to the Christian a glass in which he may look at his Christian state ; his earthly childhood is a shadow of his childhood in things heavenly.

Thus it is that our blessed LORD brings us back to childhood again, as it were a second time ; in like manner as in HIM we are brought back to that Paradise which we had lost in Adam. We are in CHRIST brought back to Paradise ; but that Paradise is not in this life a garden of Eden, full of every thing to delight us, but the garden of Gethsemane, which is watered by the blood of CHRIST, and the scene of His agonies. This is the garden in which HE takes us to watch and pray with HIM. But blessed indeed is that place, and fruitful in all good ! So also HE takes us back to childhood, teaching us to be as little children ; but it is a childhood not of ease and indulgence, but of restraint and discipline ; but it is full of hope, because it is a pledge and assurance of that New Birth which shall be in Heaven, when they that are thought worthy shall be children of GOD and like the Angels of Heaven ;—that Paradise wherein is the tree of life, by that river which proceedeth from out of the throne of GOD.

But if childhood is to be so honoured in our sight, and the pattern of innocence and humility to ourselves, how careful ought we to be of the childhood of others ; for on account of its exceeding value and worth in GOD's sight the highest Angels of Heaven watch over it : and if any one shall cause one of these little ones to fall, it shall be “ better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” Of all things

in this world, nothing is so precious as the purity of childhood. How carefully ought we to prize and value and protect it! not only because we have therein a soul fresh from the hands of the CREATOR, but also because we have a soul fresh from the new creation of holy Baptism. We know not what strugglings of the HOLY SPIRIT there are with a child,—how the HOLY ONE, the HIGH AND LOFTY ONE that inhabiteth eternity, converses with his secret spirit. Our blessed LORD was Himself hidden for many years, though HE was the eternal SON of GOD. HE was not known or recognized by those around HIM; they saw nothing in HIM of “the Arm of the LORD,” and “the Mighty Power of GOD.” In like manner, in many a child in whom HE most assuredly resides and lives, and grows with his growth, and strengthens with his strength, yet HE is unseen and unknown. Surely men know not what it is to have the charge committed to them of baptized children, of CHRIST’s little ones! Men of the world in the present day talk much of education, but they know not what it is to look on children as the Scriptures and the Church of GOD do. They would make children to be men like themselves in every thing that is worldly; whereas all wisdom which is worthy of the name they have themselves to learn of children. What they wish is, to have children to unlearn that which is alone worthy to be learned; to lose the freshness of GOD’s hand upon their souls, while it is yet unspoiled by the world.

If men, in order to be good Christians, must learn of children, then surely all our care ought to be to prevent children from learning those feelings, those passions, and those habits which are common among mankind,—those things which made our blessed SAVIOUR turn to men with awful warnings, and the absence of which made HIM so tenderly to yearn over children. Nothing is so much to be deplored in a child as to find in him that covetousness or ambition, that distrust of his fellow-creatures, that worldly prudence and deceit, which is to be found among men,—that cowardice and want of faith which keeps men from doing what they know they ought to do.

Make a child desirous to get on in the world, to know the value of money, as it is said, and eager and zealous to rise higher than others in the world, and you have done far to undo the work of GOD, to take away that which makes a child so precious in

God's sight. It is a lesson which children learn too soon, although the greatest pains are taken to rear them in heavenly-mindedness, and to keep them unspotted from the world. You do that for them which you have daily to ask God to undo for yourself, in order that you may be admitted into Heaven. The great trial and difficulty which some good men have all their lives, is to purify and cleanse their hearts from those things which they have contracted from a wrong education, from the teaching of their parents and instructors.

And what is far more powerful than wrong teaching and misguided instruction, is bad example; careless living will teach a child more powerfully than the most careful schooling. Where is the use of telling a child that this world is nothing, but that Heaven and Hell are all in all, and the only things worth caring for, if all your words and actions show that you yourself think very differently? Where is the good of teaching him that the meekness of CHRIST is the example for all Christians to follow, if you yourselves reprove and correct them with ill temper, and speak of others and to each other with anger and impatience? Which will be most powerful, your words or your example?

Those that have the care of the young should consider that they have committed into their hands the most sacred pledge that God has to afford: they should consider it the strongest engagement that could be given them to amend the whole of their own conduct, in order that they may not be the ruin both of themselves and of others. Our blessed LORD said of His disciples, "for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth." May we also, without irreverence, and in some sense not unbecoming us, venture to apply these words to ourselves also, after His adorable example, and labour to sanctify ourselves for the sake of others; not only that our prayers for them may be heard, but that our words and actions may lead them to holiness, and not far from it. Disease passes from one to another, no body knows how, particularly among those of the same family, and who are living under the same roof: and it is precisely the same with example: "with the clean thou shalt be clean, with the holy thou shalt be holy: with the froward thou shalt learn frowardness." No one can injure and destroy himself without injuring and destroying others also; no one can be

his own enemy without being the enemy of others also, and of God.

On the contrary, there is no surer and better way of improving our own hearts than by labouring by prayer, by example, and by authority, to improve the conduct of others. If any one watches carefully to preserve innocence and purity in his children, it tends in some degree to restore to himself, if not the innocence of childhood, yet the love of it, and regret for having lost it: if he labours to instil into them the love of God, it is fanning the flame or kindling the dying embers of love in his own bosom. And for a humble penitent, who has lost his own childhood by vice or idleness, it may be a great consolation to watch over and preserve from evil the childhood of others: it may keep up wholesome feelings of repentance in his own bosom, to observe in others that innocence which he himself has lost.

And the fact is, that in helplessness, in ignorance, in littleness, we are far more children in our condition than we imagine; and therefore it is, that Scripture requires us to be as children, because our highest wisdom is to know ourselves.

As our LORD requires us, if we would enter into His Kingdom, to be as children: so we may observe that His beloved disciple ever loved to address those Christians who were the objects of his most tender solicitude and affection, under the name of little children, ever delighting to repeat the word, "little children!" Blessed, indeed, must have been those Christians, who were worthy of that name,—surely they must have been free from all ambition, free from covetousness, free from envy. Blessed is that Christian whom the Psalmist describes, if it be not one greater than a Christian, even CHRIST Himself, "LORD, I am not high-minded: I have no proud looks. I do not exercise myself in great matters, which are too high for me. But I refrain my soul and keep it low, like as a child that is weaned from his mother, yea, my soul is even as a weaned child."

Like a child weaned from his mother, so is the soul which is weaned from our evil mother the world, who drinks no more "of the breast of her consolations;" but ever looks to and hangs upon that Father which is in Heaven, Who has adopted us for His own children in JESUS CHRIST.

SERMON CXVI.

THE PRAYER-BOOK OF CHRIST AND HIS SAINTS.

I COR. xiv. 15.

“ I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also : I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.”

SOME persons may be surprised that the Church should so much use the Psalms of David in Christian worship. Twice every day we are required by our Prayer-book to use the Psalms : and we find that in other times, and in other countries, the Church made use of them much more even than this, as much as seven times every day. Now we pass through the whole book of Psalms in one month ; in the old and foreign Prayer-books I speak of, we find they passed through the whole in one week.

But now some persons say, would it not be better to have Hymns written by a Christian in the present day, instead of using the devotions of a Jewish king, who lived before CHRIST ? Is it not unreasonable, they say, for an enlightened Christian in the present day to be saying so much of the enemies of David, who have so long ceased to exist, of Edom, and Moab, and Philistia ? or of Jewish tribes, as Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh ; of victories and triumphs in battle, and of overcoming enemies by sword and spear, and treading them under our feet ? Whereas, every Christian knows that all mankind are his brethren in CHRIST ; that the only way to overcome them, which the Gospel allows, is by meekness and forgiveness ; and that even to

harbour a thought of revenge, and of returning evil for evil, is highly displeasing to ALMIGHTY GOD.

Now, in answer to all this, or even if we had not one word to say in answer to it, yet a humble mind may rest assured that it is a wrong view of the case, because the Church of GOD, which, as St. Paul says, is “the pillar and ground of the truth,” has always, from the beginning, thought otherwise. And even if we had nothing more to say, we should remember that the holy David, who wrote most of the Psalms, is declared by Scripture to be a “man after GOD’s own heart.” Now this cannot be known, assuredly, of any Christian who may write books of devotion and hymns; but the fact is, that all those objections which have been stated against the use of the Psalms, are founded in great thoughtlessness, I would almost say, in unbelief. Men do not know, or, at least, do not consider, what they are speaking of when they thus speak of the Word of GOD; they forget that the Psalms were not the work of a man, are not the words and thoughts of a man, not even of the man after GOD’s own heart, but the very words of the HOLY SPIRIT of GOD.

Shall any one be so bold as to say that they are not applicable to us, because they were written before CHRIST came into the world and died for our sins? Did not the HOLY SPIRIT know what would be going on among Christians now, quite as well as what was going on then in the Kingdom of Israel? Did HE not think as much of us Christians as HE did of the Jews? Were we not as much present before HIM with all our wants, and temptations, and difficulties, as the children of Israel were of old? Surely, far more so, as Christians are brought more near to CHRIST than the Jews were; as they are especially called the sons of the SPIRIT, and are said to “know the mind of the SPIRIT,” and to have the will of GOD made known to them more than it was to the Jews; as their privileges in CHRIST are much greater, and they are brought into a more intimate union with GOD; therefore, we may be sure that the Psalms were written much more for the Christian than they were for the Jew; that the things they speak of concern us much more than they did the people of David; that they describe our condition, speak of our infirmities, our defeats, our victories, our consolations, much more than they did those of the Israelites. They of old had but

the shadow, the figure, and the type ; but the body is of CHRIST. The true Israel, the true Mount Sion, the " true Tabernacle " is with us.

Shall any body think for a moment that the Psalms are not good enough for us ? God forbid that such a thought should ever enter into the mind of a Christian. Are we better than the holy David, for whose sake God for so many generations spared His people ? Shall we think thus, in these evil days, of that book which may be considered to have been the Prayer-book of CHRIST Himself ? For it may be observed, that not only do the Psalms speak always of CHRIST, so that our Blessed SAVIOUR pointed out, it is said, to His disciples " what was written in the Psalms concerning HIM," and also frequently mentioned passages in the Psalms which, from time to time, were fulfilled in HIM ; but also in His prayers to ALMIGHTY GOD we find that HE uses the words of the Psalms. This HE does more than once on the Cross, as in that awful and solemn prayer, " My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken ME ?" From which it has been reasonably supposed that not only these words from the beginning of the Twenty-second Psalm, but that the whole of that Psalm, and other Psalms, were then, and at all times, silently in our LORD's mind ; that the words of the Psalms were oftentimes the words with which our Blessed LORD prayed to His FATHER. And on the night before the Crucifixion, when it is said, that after they had sung a hymn they went to the Mount of Olives, it always has been supposed that the hymn they sung consisted of certain Psalms.

If, therefore, we were left to judge for ourselves in such matters, and had not the Church of God to guide and direct us, it would be more reasonable to say that the Book of Psalms, being written by the Spirit and finger of God, and being, as it were, the Prayer-book of CHRIST Himself, was too holy and high a book for us of these evil days, rather than to set it aside as not good enough for us. But, in fact, any plea that would persuade us to set aside the Psalms, we may well suspect to be from the Author of Evil ; and a very early and primitive Bishop, who lived near the time of the Apostles, and wrote of the coming of Antichrist, or the great enemy of God in the last time, mentions this as one sign and token of His approach, that " Psalmody

shall cease.” Other holy men of old used to suppose that the Psalms were written more especially for the great conflict with the powers of darkness in the last days—the days of Antichrist; that they are more particularly a description of those times, and of those encounters which the few who will be found faithful will have to undergo, and are intended for the support and comfort of those few. That they will then be made use of by good Christians in those days of distress and darkness; in like manner as they were used by our LORD Himself in the horror of His extreme agony on the Cross, in His last conflict with the powers of evil, and when darkness came over the world.

And thus as this holy book was hallowed by our blessed LORD’s example, so we shall find that when the Church was in her best and purest days, then did she most of all use the Psalms, not only in her public services, but holy and good men, Martyrs and Saints of GOD, in their private devotions, were accustomed to use the Psalms. They considered themselves unworthy of them even in using them, and cherished them exceedingly. There is no subject which they seem so full of, which they speak of in such strong and glowing language; their hearts seem to overflow at the mention of them; and they seem at a loss for expressions to speak the value they attached to them, the delight they had in them, the consolation they derived from them, the treasures and stores of wisdom which they contained. They speak of them as of heavenly armour, of spiritual melodies, of treasures of knowledge, of flowers of Paradise, as the manna that came down from Heaven, as the language of the Spirit. They were continually writing upon them; showing thereby the fulness of their heart, from the abundance of which they spoke. They wrote commentaries upon them, translations of them, meditations from them, sermons from them. They were ever bewailing their ignorance of them; praying to GOD to give them the right understanding of them. The devout St. Augustin, an ancient Bishop, who appears from his writings to have been one of the most wonderful of men, speaks of his being accustomed to shed abundance of tears after his conversion, on hearing the Psalms of David in sacred worship.

The reason why some suppose the Psalms not to apply to Christians, is because they forget what the Apostle says, that

“no Scripture is of private interpretation;” that is to say, it is not to be interpreted privately, as if it only spoke of those things to which it first applies; but being the words of the HOLY GHOST, they speak to all Christians of all times.

Thus for instance, in the Lesson for this evening, when we read the account of David and the Philistine, a thoughtful person will see therein the account of CHRIST overcoming the enemy of our salvation, by humbling Himself into a very low estate. For when we see that all the cruelty and malice of our LORD’S enemies only served to show the victory of His patience and meekness, then we see HIM destroying the enemy with His own weapons; taking from him the armour wherein he trusted, and dividing the spoils. And not only of CHRIST does it speak, but also of every Christian; for always in the Old Testament we read of CHRIST and also of ourselves. And doubtless this victory of David with the sling and the stone, describes to us that faith whereby the Christian overcometh the world. The account of this battle of David and Goliath sets before us, in a most lively picture, the many promises of our LORD made to the Christian respecting the power of faith; as where he says, “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove: and nothing shall be impossible to you.”

Now surely every one must see that, in like manner, all the Psalms wherein David speaks of his enemies, is intended by the HOLY SPIRIT of CHRIST, and His Church, and our spiritual enemies. And not less so all other things which are in that holy book, speak as much of us and to us, as if they were written for none but ourselves.

Some of these things are explained to us in the New Testament; as for instance, in the eighth Psalm we read, “What is man that Thou art mindful of him; and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For Thou hast made him a little lower than the Angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour: Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands.” Now we might reasonably suppose that this was spoken of mankind in Adam, of that time when God visited him, and gave him dominion over the beasts of the field; and doubtless it does. But then St. Paul assures us, that these words were spoken of

mankind, not in Adam, but in CHRIST, when HE set our human nature at the Right hand of God, when all power was given HIM in Heaven and in earth, and "all things were put under His feet." In the very same short Psalm the psalmist David says, "Out of the mouth of very babes and sucklings hast Thou ordained strength;" but our LORD says this was spoken of the children who sang praises to HIM when HE entered the temple; and doubtless of those children whom HE took up in His arms, and said that of such is the kingdom of Heaven. It is spoken, no doubt, not of these only, but of all those meek persons who shall inherit the Kingdom, and of whom our LORD spake as of babes, saying: "I thank Thee, O FATHER, LORD of Heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."

But then it may be said, if the Psalms are to be understood throughout in this manner, then it will require knowledge and scholarship and learning to understand them. Certainly, for those who have leisure and opportunity of learning, there is no knowledge, no study so important and so valuable as a right knowledge of the Scriptures; and this requires labour and attention. But then reading and study are not the chief things required for a knowledge of the Scriptures, but a holy life; so much so, that there are some who cannot even read, and yet understand the Scriptures far better than others who can read, and who think themselves great scholars.

The Psalms are the language of the HOLY SPIRIT; and they only can understand the language of the SPIRIT who themselves have the SPIRIT of God; and we know full well, that the SPIRIT of God can only be obtained and preserved by a good life, by keeping the commandments. This, indeed, even the same person may observe something of, by changes in himself. While he is taken up by the world, the Psalms appear to him as dull and unprofitable; but when he is brought to himself by any severe affliction, then he finds that there is no language that speaks so strongly to his heart. In the day of visitation many understand those things which appeared to them before but a dead letter. *A sick bed will often explain the Psalms better than any school.* And thus it is said in the Book of the Revelation, that they who are redeemed "sing a new song before the throne;" which

no man could learn, but those which were redeemed from the earth : and this song is, it is said, “ the song of Moses and the song of the LAMB ;” not as if the song was in itself new, but the old song which was from the beginning,—the song of Moses ; but, in a new sense, the song of the LAMB. It is that Book which no one could open but “ the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David ;” which no one could explain but CHRIST : CHRIST alone can unfold and explain the Psalms.

The highest and purest delight which man is capable of in this world, and that which approaches nearest to the employment of happy spirits, is that of singing the Psalms of David : that Book which was written by the HOLY SPIRIT, which was the Prayer-book, so to speak, of our blessed SAVIOUR, which contains things which Angels desire to look into, which has been the constant study and delight of the Saints of God through all ages. Very many, whole companies of people, in better times, have risen at midnight to repeat these blessed words of devotion and praise : some have retired from the world even unto the end of their lives, to give up themselves to this one employment—night and day—namely, to be engaged without ceasing in prayer and praise to God, in that manner which must be most acceptable to HIM, by the use of His own Psalms.

But these were all persons who had weaned themselves from the world, were quite dead to all desires respecting it, who lived a life of constant self-denial ; and thus did they come to understand the Psalms, to find them sweet as honey unto their mouth, and sweeter than honey unto their throat. For they that do the will of God shall know of the doctrine : with them that keep His commandments the HOLY SPIRIT will dwell ; and they with whom HE dwells will understand and love His words, and those employments which are those of the blessed Saints in Heaven.

But we, alas, live in a generation which despises the Psalms, and even the best among us know very little how to value them on account of our own lives, being in our daily conduct, and therefore in our hearts and affections, so far inferior to the very least of God’s Saints of old.

If any one was as great a penitent as the holy David was, then he would feel the inexpressible beauty of the penitential Psalms : then he would think that no human composition could so fully

express all his sorrows, and the hopes of consolation which he found in those sorrows. He would never be weary of them. In them he would ever see the Prophet Nathan coming to him and saying, "thou art the man," the more and more to renew his repentance.

If any one had that faith in God and love of His Holy Name, which breathes throughout the Psalms, he would understand in them many things which now pass by him as if he understood them not. The Psalmist himself prays God to teach him the wonderful things of His law, implying that there were wonderful things contained in it beyond the letter, which God only could reveal. With fervent zeal and a holy fear he exclaims, "O hide not Thy commandments from me!" and this he does, knowing, as the Psalmist himself declares, that "the secret of the Lord is among them that fear Him, and He will show them his Covenant." It is God alone who even in the Psalms can show us the secret of His Covenant, and he will show it only to them that fear Him.

If a man fear God, then he feels the great need of an Advocate, a Mediator and Saviour, to stand between him and the dreadful God. And then he will, even untaught and of himself, see how full almost every Psalm is of JESUS CHRIST. Feeling the great power and subtlety of his spiritual enemies, he will understand the meaning of that "sword and shield" of the Spirit which St. Paul speaks of, and to which the Psalms so often allude: he will see more into the height, and depth, and breadth, and length of those expressions, in which the Psalms abound, as when the Psalmist says, that God is his Rock and his shield, his buckler, and his strong salvation.

Surely, as in all things else, so of this Divine and Heavenly Hymn-book we must exclaim,—“how great is the goodness of God which He hath laid up for them that fear Him!” Into the hands of the most ignorant He has put this book, which contains greater wisdom than the wisest of the world, philosophers and sages of old, ever conceived—has given him a companion on his road to Heaven, to whom he may always turn; in joy or sorrow, he will find in the world but little sympathy or comfort, but as the Apostle says, “if any one is sad let him pray, if any one is merry let him sing Psalms;” there will he ever find his delight and his counsellor; in every state of mind the Christian will find in the

Psalms a Heavenly companion, and friend, and guide, and counsellor ; he will find therein the consolations of the great Comforter, the mind of JESUS CHRIST, the wisdom of GOD. He will find therein JESUS CHRIST throughout, as his Priest, as his King, as his Mediator and Intercessor ; he will find HIM therein as man bearing our sorrows and our sins, and complaining of their heavy burden, too heavy for HIM to bear ; he will find HIM there made one with us, and exalting us in Himself to the Right hand of GOD ; he will there ever find JESUS CHRIST, not only as man, but also as GOD, knowing all things, past, and present, and future. In the Psalms he will find His eye ever upon him, about his path and his bed, and will be taught to look up to HIM, and raise his contemplations to the mind of the Psalmist himself, seeing GOD in all things, in all the affairs of life ever lifting his heart towards HIM, making HIM and His displeasure the only cause of his fears and sorrows, and making HIM and His favour and the light of His countenance the only occasion of his joy and hopes.

Blessed and Divine Book ! and blessed are they who understand it and who love it ; and blessed also are they who endeavour to understand it and to love it, and pray GOD to open their eyes that they may do so more and more. Their strength is in HIM, and their heart in His ways. As they go through the vale of misery, they will find it a well filled with living water ; they will go from strength to strength, learning to understand it still better and better, until before the GOD of gods they shall appear,—not in that earthly Sion which was the delight of the holy David, but in that heavenly Sion, where they sing that new song, which no one but themselves can fully understand, “the song of Moses and of the LAMB”—a song like that psalm which Moses sang on the shore of the Red Sea ; when they shall be for ever safe on the everlasting shore.

SERMON CXVII.

CHRISTIAN DIVISIONS.

ST. LUKE xii. 51.

“ Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division.”

WHEN missionaries go out to foreign and distant lands, on the great work of converting heathens, Jews, or Mahometans from the error of their ways, it is commonly the case that they endeavour to set forth the Christian faith to the best advantage, and with such attractions as shall be most likely to induce their hearers to embrace it. Thus we often see in some of the reports that a good deal is said about the peace, the liberty, the love and harmony which (it is said) are sure to follow wherever the Gospel is received; and very glowing descriptions are given from time to time, of the astonishing change and improvement wrought by the labours of the missionaries in their respective districts. In the mean time, any discouraging and doubtful circumstances which may have occurred, are generally either quite passed over, or very slightly noticed.

Now all this is natural enough, and (considering what human weakness is) also, perhaps, very pardonable.

Yet it is much to be observed, that such was not the way in which the Prince and Pattern of missionaries and preachers, our LORD JESUS CHRIST, accomplished “the great work which the FATHER gave HIM to do.” We observe that HE, our adorable

SAVIOUR, never endeavoured (if one may so speak with reverence) to set forth his religion to the best advantage, or in the most attractive form. HE dwelt as much on the difficulties and trials, as on the comforts and benefits attending the faithful profession of the Gospel. Nay, more than this, HE seems to have taken particular pains to prevent His first disciples from imagining that the success of the Gospel would be complete, or at all such as might be expected. HE warned them of these things, and not them only, but Christians of every age, for two purposes; both that they might acknowledge His Divine prescience, and also that they might not be cast down or discouraged when things should turn out so different from what they were naturally inclined to look for.

“These things have I said unto you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them.”

There are numerous instances of our LORD's great care to prevent men from expecting *too much* from His Gospel. I mean from expecting that the effects of it would be proportioned to its truth and its importance.

Of these instances let me mention two or three.

One occurs in the 14th chapter of St. Luke's Gospel, where it seems that our LORD having been invited to a feast at the house of one of the chief Pharisees, His discourse, and perhaps His manner altogether, so affected one of the guests, that he could not restrain himself from uttering his thoughts aloud, “Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God.” Meaning, how happy should they be who would be admitted to the privileges of the MESSIAH's kingdom, the Gospel of CHRIST. Whereupon our LORD, in a parable, addressed, you will observe, not to all the company, but to the person who made the forementioned observation,—in the parable, I say, of the great supper, HE set forth most distinctly the way in which His Gospel would be received by the generality of mankind. “They all with one consent began to make excuse.” “None of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.”

Another instance of the same discouraging tone (if it may be so called) occurs in that same 14th chapter. For the sacred historian, having observed that there went great multitudes with

JESUS, goes on to say, that HE, so far from giving them any encouragement, stopped in the way, turned round, and addressed them to this effect: "If any man come to ME, and forsaketh not all that he hath, his coming is in vain, he cannot be My disciple."

Again, in His solemn prophetic discourse with His disciples, just before the last passover, how disheartening and melancholy to human thought is the account which HE condescended to give of the future condition of the Christian world! I refer to the tendency of those general expressions, which evidently imply that the state of things in the latter days of the Church militant on earth would be far from triumphant, even fearful and alarming in the greatest degree.

Thus, "Take heed that no man deceive you. Many shall come in my name, many false prophets, and shall deceive many." "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many—of *the* many, the generality of Christians—shall wax cold." "When the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"

To hear the blessed JESUS speak thus of the reception which His religion would meet with in the earth, to hear HIM so solemnly foretell that it should every where prevail, and yet every where be in practice slighted and neglected¹, this, I say, must have astonished his disciples, who were, of course, ready to think that if His Gospel were from Heaven, surely it would win and overpower the hearts of all men to whom it should be proposed. HE, however, in mercy to them and to us, forewarned us all plainly, both by the word of His own sacred lips, and afterwards also in the writings of His Apostles, that as the world in profession grew more and more Christian, Christians would grow more and more worldly, till in the end, nothing more scarcely than the name and profession of the Gospel would remain; the profession might remain, the practice would be gone.

And as HE taught men to expect, that notwithstanding all the

¹ "From year to year the signs of wrath
Are gathering round the Judge's path;
Strange words fulfill'd, and mighty works achieved,
And truth in all the world both hated and believed."

blessed influences of His revelation, love would grow cold, and faith in a manner disappear ; so also did he warn them, that even His kingdom on earth would be rent with divisions, that even the days of the Gospel would not be days of peace.

“Suppose ye, (said HE, as it should seem with peculiar solemnity and plainness,) suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth ? I tell you, Nay ; but rather division.”

As if HE had said,—You no doubt expect that as My Gospel is essentially a Gospel of peace, as one of the most glorious titles of the MESSIAH is that HE should be “ the Prince of Peace,” and as the angels sung at My birth not only Glory to God in the highest, but also peace on earth,—you, I say, expect that in My Church and fold gradually extending its limits over the whole world, there will be peace and harmony. But I tell you, Nay ; rather division and discord will accompany the Gospel wherever it finds its way. Henceforth, that is, now shall begin to be fulfilled that ancient prediction of the prophet Micah :

“The son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law ; a man’s enemies are the men of his own house.”

We cannot then doubt that our omniscient LORD and SAVIOUR prophesied even in the first foundation of His Church, that discord and division should prevail in it ; even to such a degree as to break up the peace of families and neighbourhoods, to the hindrance of kindly intercourse between friends and relatives, to the overthrow of all spiritual authority, and ultimately to the extreme decay, and almost to the final extinction of faith and love out of the earth.

That signs of so disastrous and fearful a consummation have long been visible, is, I suppose, what no person of serious observation will deny or question.

The number of sects or denominations (as they are called) of Christians is now become so great in all parts of the world almost where Christianity is known, that I suppose it would be past any one’s power to reckon them up. In our own country we know to what a height religious disputes and dissensions have been carried ; and though owing to certain causes such controversies are not conducted with so much bitterness as they were some

years ago, yet no one I think will assert, that as a nation we have made any approaches towards Christian unity.

And if the generality of people are not so violent and bitter as they used to be about religious differences, or, according to the common way of speaking, are not so *bigoted*—this is no sign of the growth of a spirit of peace and love—but rather no doubt it is owing to a very different cause, viz. the secret though rapid increase of infidelity and the kingdom of Antichrist.

For it is plain that nothing more strengthens the cause of infidelity, than the opinion that schisms and divisions are matters of trifling consequence—that CHRIST's authorized ministers are only worthy of scorn and contempt, *as such*—that every man's own feelings are the true test of his own spiritual condition. These notions, which lie at the root of schisms and divisions in the Church, tend also, though it is not observed, to the rapid increase of deism and infidelity—such as appeared in France about fifty years ago, and no doubt will very soon be sufficiently evident in this country—indeed I may say are now evident to all attentive, impartial observers of the state of things.

Thus then we see fulfilled before our own eyes, in a very remarkable manner, that ancient prophecy (for such it is) of the blessed JESUS, that his Gospel would be a means of giving not peace on earth, but rather division.

And from this prophecy let me urge on your thoughts (as many of you as care for these things) two considerations:—one of comfort; one of warning.

And first, it is a ground of comfort and thankfulness that our gracious God, in this as in other cases, can make “the fierceness of man to turn to His praise;” that in the miserable divisions and sects which have rent the Universal Church, HE gives the faithful Christian a powerful visible testimony of the truth of the Gospel. For let it be observed, that if, according to human expectation, it had been prophesied that the days of the Gospel should be days of peace and harmony—if nothing had been said of what we now see, the almost universal prevalence of the spirit of division and separation—then the scoffer might have said that Christianity was false, and its FOUNDER a deceiver, in

having held out promises and hopes that were never to be realized.

But now nothing of this can be alleged—the most hardened infidel, however he may declaim against Christianity (as, alas ! he may too easily do) on account of the conduct of Christians, the divisions, the dissensions among us, yet at least he must confess that these very things were prophesied of by the LORD JESUS HIMSELF and His Apostles, and that these prophecies are now too plainly fulfilled in the present condition of the Christian world.

The faithful Christian, then, however he may deplore the events, yet at least derives comfort from the thought that they form a strong, and—as even an infidel must confess—a plain, undeniable proof in favour of the truth of the Gospel.

Yet, on the other hand, and in a different point of view, these considerations may well suggest to us much matter of grief, also of solemn warning as to our own personal duty in such trials. For I think it must be confessed to be one of the severest trials to sincere Christians in these days, and one comparatively unknown to Christians in the early ages of the Church—the extreme prevalence of schisms and divisions, supported and encouraged on the false and pernicious principle that human authority is not to be listened to in matters of religion.

For now, if a young person who has been brought up in the way that is now most usual, without any great attention to his religious instruction, should begin to think seriously about these matters, the first thing he observes is that religious persons themselves are divided one from another, and all equally positive that they are right. And as he knows they cannot be all right, so he thinks they are perhaps all wrong, and therefore draws back at the very threshold, and renounces in fact all Christian communion.

These kind of cases I am confident are very frequent ; and it should seem that they who make schisms and causeless divisions in the Church of CHRIST will have much to answer for on account of souls so perishing for whom CHRIST died.

“It is impossible but that offences come, but woe to him through whom they come.” This was one of the most solemn and affecting warnings ever delivered by the holy JESUS, and it seems to have something prophetic in it, as if HE were then looking forward to the scandalous divisions, the misery and ruin which would be brought into His Church, His fold, by the wiles of the great enemy, practising on the proud and corrupt hearts of fallen man.

In conclusion, let me observe that it is difficult to speak on this subject faithfully, and with that charity which should guide the thoughts and words of all Christians, especially of Christian ministers. The reason why it is difficult to speak hereon, is because divisions and separations in religion are come to be accounted of small consequence, and no matter of blame; and also because it is taken for granted that clergymen (I mean the majority of us) are actuated herein by sordid and worldly motives of some kind or other. But still, however blind we may be and ignorant of Gospel truth, if people choose to say so; however false may be our doctrine, however corrupt and worldly our lives—yet surely the truth of GOD remains the same; surely, St. Paul says, “schisms and divisions are evidences of a carnal spirit;” surely he says that “we ought to avoid those who cause divisions and offences,” adding, that “they serve *not* the LORD JESUS CHRIST but their own belly,” their own feelings and fancies, “and with good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.” *Our* opinion then may be of no value, but surely that of St. Paul is worth attending to, all must confess.

These things we are bound from time to time to press on your thoughts, with our earnest prayers at the throne of Divine Grace, that we may all be enabled more and more to perceive the value of love and harmony, of unity, peace, and concord; that we may ever love the truth and peace—be ever more ready to hear than to speak, to obey than to command; and, following the advice of the great St. Paul, that we lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty; and, finally, that we cherish no bitter, angry feelings against those who have departed from the faith and unity of the Church; nor, on the

other hand, be too confident and positive about our own spiritual condition, but humbly and habitually beseech ALMIGHTY GOD for His dear SON's sake, that those who are gone astray may be brought back, and that we may be all led into the way of truth, and enabled to hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life.

SERMON CXVIII.

CHRISTIAN WORLDLINESS.

ST. LUKE xvii. 26.

“As it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man.”

WE are placed, each of us, in the midst (as it were) of a vast eternity: on the one side of us is the eternity which is past; on the other the eternity which is to come. So also as inhabitants of this earth on which we tread, we occupy (as it were) an intermediate point in the course of its existence. On looking back, we are able, by the aid of authentic testimony, that namely of Scripture history, to realise to our minds the great events which have taken place in times past; and on looking forward, we are able also, by the light of authentic prophecy, to foresee the great events which are drawing on upon the world; some near, some farther off.

Some persons might perhaps think that it is of no use for people to trouble their minds with inquiring into events long since accomplished, or with looking forward to such as will not take place till this world shall draw towards its end, and they perhaps shall have been long in their graves. It might be supposed, that such inquiries are vain and useless, a mere waste of time, and that people would act more wisely, in limiting their thoughts and views to their own times, and to matters of present and immediate interest. Nevertheless the fact does certainly seem

to be, that we are, *now*, very much concerned in events which have long since past, and also in those which are to come hereafter. The knowledge of these, a due consideration of and inquiry into them, together with a course of thought and conduct influenced by such knowledge and consideration, is certainly no vain speculation or waste of time, but a matter of present and immediate duty. At least, if it be not so, how is it to be accounted for that the volume of Scripture, the revealed Word of God, should be so full as it is of history and of prophecy—history of things past, and prophecy, that is, history of things to come?

And if it should be said that certainly there are in the Scriptures a great many prophecies, but that they are nearly all in the *Old Testament*, and have been long since fulfilled: it might be answered, first of all, that there are even in the *Old Testament* numberless predictions which have not yet received their final accomplishment; and secondly, that the *New Testament* is remarkably full of prophecies, in proportion more so than the *Old*, as might easily be shown.

The right study of history and prophecy, therefore, that is, a reverential inquiry into the Divine revelations concerning what has been before, and what shall be hereafter,—this is not merely natural and allowable to thoughtful persons, but it is even a Christian duty, and the neglect of it must evince a want of seriousness about Christian truth,—must shew that men have a low notion of the value of “the glorious Gospel of the blessed God.”

On examining the authentic and sacred records of the most ancient history, it appears, that about 4190 years ago, when mankind in general had greatly forgotten their Heavenly LORD and CREATOR, HE determined to inflict on them his severe and heavy judgments.

That forgetfulness of God, and neglect of all serious thought, were the crimes which drew down on that miserable generation the wrath of the ALMIGHTY, is plain from comparing together what is said on the subject in the *Old* and *New Testaments*.

In the *Old Testament* we find that at that time “God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that

every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," that "the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence," and that this corruption had arrived to so desperate a height, that "it even repented the LORD that HE had made man on the earth, and it grieved HIM at His heart." Now that the wickedness of man, thus fearfully described, consisted in fact in the indulgence of a worldly spirit, and forgetfulness of God and His devout service—in one word, in want of faith, we find from looking to those places in the New Testament where the same evil times are referred to. For it is a thing much to be observed, that in those places, it is not altogether the prevalence of gross and heinous *crimes* which is mentioned, as constituting the guilt and danger of the men of that generation, but habits and practices, wrong, not in themselves, but in the degree they were indulged in. Thus, in the well-known prophecies of our LORD, detailed by St. Matthew and also by St. Luke, the account given of the moral condition of the world at that period is this:—

"In the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, down to the very day in which Noah entered into the ark; and yet they knew not (that is, had no sense of their condition) until the flood came, and took them all away." In the eleventh chapter to the Hebrews, it is said that "Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet,"—that must mean, of the impending judgments of God on a wicked world, of the approach of which judgments, however, there was as yet no evident symptom,—he nevertheless, "moved with fear" and reverence of the Divine warnings, "prepared an ark for the saving of his house" and family, "by which he condemned the world," that is, by building the ark he gave the strongest proof of his own faith in the Divine warnings, and at the same time he bore open testimony against the faithless worldly spirit by which people in general were influenced in those evil days.

This seems to be confirmed by what St. Peter says in his Second Epistle, where, calling to mind the ALMIGHTY'S heavy judgments on sinners, whether angels or men, in times past, he says, that "God spared not the old world, but saved only Noah, that preacher or herald of righteousness, with seven others, bringing in a flood on

a world of ungodly men"—ungodly, that is, according to the force of the original word, irreligious, leading lives quite inconsistent with devoted piety and holiness.

In which passage, where Noah is designated as "a preacher or herald of righteousness" to an ungodly world, it seems implied that his messages and warnings, though supported by Divine authority, were only treated with neglect and contempt, and this even to the last, to the very hour when he entered into the ark.

Thus then "the days of Noah were,"—men's minds were given up to earthly cares and earthly enjoyments—true piety and holiness were set aside as impertinencies, and what people had something else to do than attend to ; and if a person with authority from heaven preached righteousness to them, warned them by his life and doctrine of the dangerous course they were pursuing, he was only met with scorn, or at the best with disregard.

Such was the state of mankind about 4200 years ago. But what (it may be asked) does this concern us? if it is our chief and only business to attend to ourselves, why need we trouble ourselves to look back and inquire how people lived and died in ages so long past?

An answer to this question is provided in our LORD's own solemn, prophetic words. Because, (said he) exactly "as the days of Noah were, so shall the coming of the SON of Man be."

Therefore it evidently greatly concerns us ; it is no matter of useless inquiry or speculation for us to look back to that remote period, to ascertain what symptoms there are now of a state of things similar to that which prevailed before the first destruction of the world by water, and also whether we each of us personally are in earnest preparing for that final judgment by fire, when the wicked world shall be for ever swept away, and there shall be no safety but in the ark of CHRIST's Church—when none but those who have "watched and prayed always," that is, have in earnest endeavoured to lead a life of watchfulness and prayer, "shall be accounted worthy to escape all those things which shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

“As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the SON of Man.” How, it may be asked, is it in our days? Must not the person who wishes to see things in the most cheerful light, and to put the most favourable construction on people’s conduct and professions, must he not confess that in many respects the condition of the world now is not *very* different from that in which the sacred records describe it to have been “in the days that were before the flood?”

In those days, it appears, men’s minds, almost universally, were given up to earthly cares and earthly enjoyments.

Can it be said with truth that the great majority of people in Christian countries, and much more in others, do not answer this description in these our times?

This our nation of England, for instance, is a nation professedly Christian, and it is called a religious nation, and the knowledge of pure evangelical truth is confidently said to be more general and more fruitful here than in other countries professing Christianity. Whether this be indeed the case or not, may perhaps be a question. At all events it is certain, that a knowledge of the great truths of the Gospel is within the reach of all inquiring persons amongst us, and that in all ordinary cases it must be a person’s own fault if he lives and dies in ignorance of these truths.

Yet now, with all these advantages, let it only be considered how many, many persons suffer their minds to be distracted and torn in pieces with various cares,—cares of business, family cares,—fretting, anxious, and full of thoughts for the morrow, as if they could manage better for themselves than God could manage for them! How many to whom Sunday is no day of rest, no season of refreshment from low-born anxieties and toils, no sab-bath of soothing hope and peaceful anticipation of an eternal home!

How many, again, who make ease and pleasure their idol, who desire to live what is called a comfortable life, nor will let any thing interfere with this their desire, no, not the voice of natural feeling, or of the world’s opinion, much less of religion and conscience!

So it was in the days before the flood, and so evidently it is

now in the days of the SON of Man, in the midst of the light and knowledge of the Gospel of CHRIST JESUS.

In the old world, too, it appears that true piety and holiness were set aside as impertinencies, and what people had something else to do than to attend to.

Will any considerate, unprejudiced person deny that this kind of "ungodliness" is but too prevalent in these latter days?

For let such things as these only be considered—

How little care people, even religious people, have about ascertaining *the truth* in matters of religion, but follow habit, or fancy, or feeling, or the custom of others, all of which, in a matter so important as our eternal interests, are nothing whatever to depend on.

Again, how apt people are to make religion a matter of personal disputes, or of worldly politics, and in these respects to treat it as a subject of importance; putting aside entirely, or in a great degree, its real value, namely, its reference to our condition throughout eternity, in happiness without fear of change, or in misery without hope of it.

And if what is called the religious world amongst us is thus debased by worldly and carnal politics, what are we to think of the state of society wherein so many of all ranks, from the highest to the lowest, not merely in practice, but openly and avowedly, "care for none of these things," but (if the truth must be confessed) can scarcely be described as other than infidels and atheists?

So it was in the days of Noah, and so *we see it* to be also in the days of the SON of Man.

Finally, when in those days an authorized herald of God, "a preacher of righteousness," warned men of their dangerous courses, he was met with scorn, or, at best, with neglect.

So it was in the days of Noah, and so it is now.

The authorized ministers of the Gospel, *as such*, are notoriously disregarded; that is, respect is had rather to the person than to the office. I need not say how the voice of the Church is scorned, or, as one may say, hooted down, and her authority cast off; and this, alas! not merely by "the world of the ungodly," but even

by multitudes who make great pretensions to religious light and knowledge.

Many no doubt scorned and ridiculed righteous Noah, while he was preparing the ark in obedience to the Divine warning. In like manner do Christians receive with a smile of scorn *our* warnings, when we caution them against trusting to the opinions and practices, however plausible, of the world around them, and intreat them to take refuge in the ark of CHRIST'S Church, that so (as the Prayer-book says, with its usual exquisite beauty of expression,) "being stedfast in faith, joyful through hope, and rooted in charity, they may so pass the waves of this troublesome world, that finally they may come to the land of everlasting life."

But, alas! it is too certain, and confirmed by all experience, that where prejudice or sensuality have taken possession of the mind and heart, the voice of truth cannot be listened to. According to the wonderfully energetic description which we find in Scripture of this kind of ungodliness—

"Their poison is like the poison of a serpent; they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear, which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely."

Such then, and so dangerous, being the condition in which we are placed, and warnings so plain and decisive having been given us, let it be our earnest care and constant prayer that the last coming of the Son of Man may not find us unprepared.

Let us think of that world of the ungodly which was cut off by the flood, when they thought themselves secure, when they had no expectation of any such calamity, nay, when they had scorned and despised God's warnings by his authorized messenger and herald.

Let us think that though but few particulars are told us concerning the day of final judgment, yet this is plainly pressed on our thoughts: that as the great deluge did formerly, so the great fire will hereafter, find the world of the ungodly, thoughtless and unprepared.

And then can we doubt that we are living in a world of the ungodly, in a wicked world, as the Catechism taught us?

And if so, how can we be but full of fear and trembling, how

can we be satisfied with any life but a life of watchfulness and prayer, when we reflect that when that day comes, it will be too late to cry for mercy? The REDEEMER will then be the Judge, and there will then be no daysman betwixt us¹, none to speak for us, if our pardon have not been sealed in heaven before that day.

These are great and awful thoughts, yet founded in truth and reality ; and if we put them by for the present, we may do so, as we have no doubt already too often before ; yet surely " God's Spirit will not always strive with man," and to any one of us, for aught we know to the contrary, each warning may be the last.

¹ Job ix. 33.

SERMON CXIX.

NECESSITY OF PRACTICAL CONVERSION.

EZEKIEL xxxiii. 11.

“Say unto them, As I live, saith the LORD GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”

OUR attention can scarcely be too often called to the necessity of deep and practical repentance, also to the consideration of men's great unwillingness, nevertheless, to yield their hearts to it: I intend, therefore, on the present occasion, under the Divine blessing, to direct your thoughts to this same all-important subject, by offering some practical reflections on the great truth revealed to us both by Prophets and Apostles, that our heavenly LORD and Master “desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live.”

And how this consideration ought in all reason to affect us—the consideration, I mean, of ALMIGHTY GOD's tender anxiety for our everlasting good—how this ought to touch us, first in the way of warning, and then of encouragement, is what I now desire, with the aid of GOD's HOLY SPIRIT, to press on the hearts and consciences of serious persons. As to the *warning* contained in this high doctrine, it seems obviously and inevitably to result from it, that our spiritual and everlasting condition is in some mysterious manner placed within our own power—that if we die, spiritually and eternally, it will be our own doing, the

consequence of our own wilful presumptuousness and miserable folly.

People sometimes think, or at least talk as if they thought, and perhaps more often still act, though unconsciously, on the notion, that they are in God's hands for good or for evil ; that it is useless for them to strive or take any pains about things spiritual ; that like clay in the potter's hands, they are made for honour or dishonour by some unchangeable irrevocable decree. This view of our condition is sometimes called Calvinistic, Predestinarian, and other such names, but I apprehend the root of it lies deeper than such terms would seem to imply ; it is a view far more agreeable to our present fallen nature, and therefore far more commonly cherished by us all, than we are ourselves aware of, because it soothes and flatters our indolence, now, alas ! natural to us ; and whatever soothes and flatters our indolence we are sure to give ear to, more or less, I suppose, all of us.

Hence it is that the case is not a rare one for people to speak and argue very vehemently against what they call Predes- tination and Calvinism, and yet all the while live without care or anxiety about their own spiritual condition ; as if they were quite safe and secure, and need scarcely seek, much less strive to enter in at the strait gate. Far better and wiser would it be for Christians to consider their condition, not as a matter of philosophical speculation, but in that practical way in which the Bible and the Church uniformly represent it to us, viz., as a condition of trial and probation *to each one of us*. We are, indeed, surrounded with mysteries, mysteries which we can no more solve or explain than we can reach the stars which we see surround our earth in a clear night. But at present these great things concern us not ; we have, in fact, neither time nor faculties for them ; we have a work to do which must be done “ daily, whilst it is called to-day ;” and that work is the work of repentance—the getting rid of all that is amiss in us, the growing and increasing in all that is pure and holy.

Vain, therefore, and worse than vain, is the notion which we all so readily cherish—that our spiritual condition is not within our own power—that the ALMIGHTY will do with us as HE pleases, without regard to our own exertions. Certainly, HE

will do with us as HE pleases, or as the Apostle says emphatically, “according to the counsel of His own will.” But then it is His irrevocable will and counsel, that “without holiness” no man shall be admitted to His beatific presence. HE wills not indeed that any should perish; yet, as it immediately follows, unless by coming to repentance, in what way can we escape perishing? HE has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, yet if men turn not from their evil ways, they must and will die; it is not God’s choice, but their own, for themselves.

For that is another great matter of warning implied in the great doctrine we are now considering, that we have before us no alternative, but either to turn or to perish. “Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” Hence we are taught, most plainly and decisively, that there is no middle way; but that we must either turn or perish.

And if a person should ask what is meant here by turning—turning, that is, from our evil ways; I suppose no seriously reflecting mind would be at a loss for the answer, at least to itself.

Let a person calmly and seriously call himself to account, looking back on past years, and forward on what he supposes are before him; let him calculate (if he will) that he shall live to be seventy, or seventy-five, or eighty years old, and that he shall enjoy his health and faculties to the last; then let him think whether, when all is over, and he has gone on to the last as he is going on now, he shall be fit and prepared to meet his God, and to be admitted into the society of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect. And let him not flatter himself with superficial notions or popular delusions, but put it solemnly to his own heart and conscience, whether the way in which he is going on now, is or is not *in all respects* such as becomes a baptized and sworn Christian; such (I say) as becomes one who is adopted into God’s family, whose home is in heaven, who has at the baptismal font taken a solemn leave of all earthly hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, and pledged himself to desire only so to pass through things temporal, as that finally he may not lose the things eternal.

If we, my brethren, find, on looking on ourselves and our

present way of life, that it is not, *in all respects*, suitable to these our strict vows and lofty privileges, let us know assuredly, that to us the affectionate warning of our FATHER in Heaven is addressed, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" O Church and body of CHRIST, children of GOD, and inheritors of the kingdom of Heaven, notwithstanding all your great and blessed privileges, why will ye die?

If then we would not die, that is, would not be eternally shut out from the favour and mercy of the LORD ALMIGHTY, there is but one alternative, we must turn; that is, whatever sin, negligence, or ignorance, we now allow ourselves in, in whatever respect we are now going on amiss, we must vigorously, resolutely, and systematically set ourselves, (as the Catechism says) "to lead a new life,"—in that respect to be different from what we have been and are.

The state of the heart and conscience may be ascertained by what appear perhaps small things, but which to a rightly-judging mind, and in the sight of ALMIGHTY GOD, are not small; and this, not merely because they are signs and tokens of a corrupt state of heart altogether, but also, because they are in each particular case gross offences; though possibly from their not often occurring to the recollection, or from some other cause, they do not appear to the conscience in this evil light.

Let me mention a few instances, by way of illustrating the *kind* of delusion against which I would warn you.

Many persons, even religiously disposed, continue for years and years cherishing a sort of smothered dislike, in fact more or less of unkind or uncharitable feeling, towards some neighbour or other, whom they never *can* think well of. Now this is an evil way of going on—a way to be turned from and got out of with all speed. For whatever other people may be, we at least cannot be what Christians ought to be, if we harbour any feeling towards another, inconsistent with genuine Christian love and good-will. The question for us is, not what other people are, but what we ought to be.

Again, many decent respectable persons, to all appearance, never pray to God in His holy habitation. Whether it is so in dissenting meeting-houses I cannot say, but too surely it is matter of common observation, that many who call themselves

Church people, whenever they do come to church do not come to pray. They sit and hear the prayers read perhaps, but they cannot in any sense be said to pray.

One great cause of this is, that so many people never have been used to kneel in the church; and having never been used to do it, they are ashamed to begin, and afraid of being laughed at; or else they do not like to take the trouble.

But whatever the cause, the fact is too certain, that God's house to many persons is no house of prayer—a house of music, or a house of preaching, it may be; but not a house of prayer.

This is an evil way surely of treating the blessed privileges placed within our reach, and one which the sooner we turn from the better. God is mocked by this sort of conduct, and will sooner or later make us feel His vengeance.

Again, while some persons (it is to be feared) presume to come to the holy table of the Lord with unregenerate, uncharitable, worldly hearts, great numbers on the other hand, equally presumptuous (it is evident), excommunicate themselves on the plea that they are not fit; a plea which is the poorest of all things, for it is no reason, and but a poor excuse:—no reason, for in the sense they mean they will never be fit; and but a poor excuse, for why do they not endeavour to become fit?

The fact is, it is altogether an evil way—evil, when men come without a repenting believing heart—evil, when they stay away habitually for any cause at all.

At least, if the Scripture is true, these ways are evil. Let all turn from them who do not wish to go on living without God in the world, and to die at last the second death.

To mention one more matter of warning. Many persons, keeping up a certain character for religion, will allow themselves from time to time in what may be called sly ways of evil. They will take an advantage of a neighbour in some matter of business; in cases where they think they are sure of not being found out; or, where the forms of law enable them to defraud him, (for it is a fraud,) they will not much scruple; or perhaps in an underhand way they will say something indirectly, which may injure his character for a long time after: in such ways as these, which surely we must all allow are very evil ways, (at least we shall allow it when ourselves are the sufferers,) we may, almost without

knowing it ourselves, or appearing so to others, in the sight of the omniscient God be guilty of the worst crimes.

Hence the necessity of our examining ourselves so strictly, and turning so resolutely from all that we find amiss in us, as knowing that evil dispositions, when allowed of, lead to evil habits. "Lust, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

But consider again what encouragement and consolation to all humble and contrite hearts is contained in the divine words, "As I live, saith the LORD God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

Here we see that, evil and undeserving as we are, yet that our Heavenly FATHER watches over us with the utmost possible tenderness and anxiety; and not merely this, but (if one may so speak with reverence) has taken great pains to impress on our hearts the conviction that HE does so watch over us.

This HE has mercifully ordered, as among other reasons, so no doubt for this: that humble, contrite souls, trembling at God's word, His word of awful warning, through patience and comfort of the same Scriptures might also have hope; that by so many immutable promises, in which it was impossible for God to lie, they might have strong consolation, seeking HIM in His own appointed ways, the ways of His Church, with deep and heartfelt penitence and humble reliance on the blood of the REDEEMER, and the guidance of His HOLY SPIRIT.

To persons so disposed, worthily lamenting their sins, and acknowledging their wretchedness—worthily, that is, according as that wretchedness and those sins justly call for lamentation,—to hearts so cast down, I say, the consolation is invaluable, contained in the thought that the holy and just God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked: and this encourages them to go forward with cheerful and happier thoughts—to strive to please so kind and compassionate a FATHER—to think no sacrifice too great which may evince their confidence, gratitude, and filial love towards HIM who has forgiven them so often, and loved them so tenderly.

The considerate mind, pursuing the same line of thought, will be greatly comforted by the conviction, that there is no need or ground whatever for any sincere penitent to despair, though, perhaps, it will at the same time appear, that this tendency (I mean to encourage feelings of despair) is more common than we generally suppose. Thus, as we find in the verse immediately preceding the text, the Jews in Ezekiel's time were in the habit of renouncing all exertion, and at the same time all hope, under pretence that if they were so wicked as the prophets described them, there was no possibility of their being restored to the Divine favour. "If our transgressions and our sins be upon us (said they), and we pine away in them, how should we then live?" Some probably talked in this way from mere despondency, and some from pride and indolence, because they did not wish to acknowledge their sinfulness, or to take any pains or trouble about religion at all. And this latter is (I suppose) the kind of despair which is most to be guarded against, and not that which leads a person to be low and desponding about his spiritual condition, though this last is the most painful to bear for the time, but the other the most fatal in its consequences. However, against both there is offered the most merciful and solemn encouragement in the Divine assurance—"As I live, saith the LORD GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live."

And hence we are taught further, that whoever turns from any evil way, any wrong course, either of sin committed, or of duty neglected,—whoever, I say, though ever so faintly, sincerely resolves and endeavours to amend what is amiss in himself, such a person has unquestionably God's blessing on him, has the best possible pledge and test that he is so far in the right way—a pledge and test, doubtless, more to be depended on than any external flattery or internal feeling.

A person who learns to be suspicious of himself, and not to go on any longer in that self-confident manner which we are too apt to do, even the best of us, soon finds that he cannot trust his own feelings, or other people's example or opinion. He asks himself, Am or am I not in earnest trying to be more what a Christian ought to be? Am I more resolute against all evil ways, all

deceitful notions of being satisfied with half religion ; all ways and views inconsistent with the rule of life laid down for us all in the Holy Gospel of the LORD JESUS CHRIST ? And putting these questions to his conscience from day to day, he still finds plenty to correct and amend, and so will find to his dying day—so, I say, that even on his dying bed he can only “lift up his heart with his hands,” and call for mercy in His LORD’s own prayer—“Forgive me my trespasses, as I forgive them that trespass against me.”

These things then let us consider, and reposing our full trust on the unbounded compassion of our Heavenly FATHER, let us at the same time be careful lest we become careless and presumptuous. If we are not aware of our faults, let us search and inquire, and they will soon appear ; God sees them, though we do not. And thus striving sincerely, and resolutely, and consistently, to grow in grace, and in the true practical knowledge of our gracious SAVIOUR, we need not fear but His blessing will be upon us, to lead us in all the way wherein we should go, even through the valley of the shadow of death, to our Home above, the House not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens.

SERMON CXX.

MAN'S SIN, GOD'S JUDGMENT.

(*TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.*)

HAB. i. 12, 13.

"O LORD, THOU hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty GOD, THOU hast established them for correction. THOU art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity."

THOSE who have given any attention to the rules prescribed by the Prayer Book of the English Church, must be aware that there are Proper Lessons out of the Old Testament appointed for all the Sundays throughout the year.

The word lesson, or lecture, is a Latin word, which signifies "reading;" and it has been used from ancient times in the Church to express such a portion of Scripture as could conveniently be read at once. Such portions were called readings or lessons; just as we say that in our Church Service, morning and evening, there are appointed first and second lessons, that is, first and second readings.

Now as there are four such readings assigned for every day throughout the whole year, so we observe that on Sundays and other sacred days there are select readings, or, as we commonly call them, Proper Lessons.

Yet I suppose it may be said without irreverence, that for the hardness of men's hearts this rule was made, but from the beginning it was not so.

From the beginning, as is plainly to be seen from the Calendar, and other rules in the Prayer Book, the intention of the Church

was, that the Scriptures should be read for the most part regularly through, the Old Testament once, and the New Testament thrice, in the course of every year.

But as time went on, and it appeared that people either would not or could not be brought to give daily attention to these great matters; so in the reign of King James I., about fifty or sixty years after what we call the Reformation, Proper Lessons (as I said) were appointed for Sundays.

We may suppose that the Church did this as it were with a heavy heart—driven to it in a manner by the stubbornness and waywardness of her sons. We may suppose this, from the circumstance of the other lessons being still let to remain, (as, for instance, to-day there are lessons for the sixteenth day of October, as well as for the twenty-first Sunday after Trinity,) and also from the imperfect (necessarily imperfect) course of Scripture reading which these Sunday lessons, taken by themselves, supply.

Of which this may be an evidence: that as in the Old Testament, taking all the books, including the Psalms, there are about nine hundred and thirty-nine chapters, of these, except the Psalms, only one hundred and six, or about that number, are assigned to be read in the course of Divine Service on Sundays. So that people who only hear the Old Testament read at church, especially if they can or will go to church on Sunday only, and but once on a Sunday, have but a small portion indeed, not an eighth part, if they go twice; if once, not a sixteenth of that most sacred Volume solemnly pressed on their attention.

But, as I said before, this is not the fault of the Church, but is one symptom among many of the decayed state of religion among Christians of these latter days.

The Church has provided these Sunday Lessons to be regularly read every year as the Sundays come round. But doubtless it is not meant that people are to limit their thoughts to the lessons of each Sunday only, but to look also to their place in the sacred History. As, to mention two instances out of many, on the seventh Sunday after Trinity, in the afternoon, is read, 2 Sam. xxiv., containing some remarkable events in the history of David. But on the following Sunday, viz. the eighth, when one might naturally expect the account of David's death, or of Solomon's

succession, his building the Temple and the dedication of it, or of Jeroboam's history, or of the revolt of the ten tribes, all these most interesting matters are passed over, and the next read chapter is, 1 Kings xiii., concerning the idolatrous and schismatical worship at Bethel ; as if the Church was compelled in a manner by the neglect of her sons to omit so much matter of the deepest interest, and, hardly knowing what to fix on, would at least give them a solemn lesson of instruction, if nothing else. But then, no doubt, it is also supposed that serious and reflecting persons would make themselves acquainted with the parts of Scripture *omitted* from Sunday to Sunday. Otherwise it seems almost impossible to understand what is read.

Another instance of the evil now lamented may be this :—that out of the divine books of the twelve minor Prophets, as they are called, only three chapters are appointed for Sunday lessons, viz. (as last Sunday) one of Joel, one of Micah, and one (as to-day) of Habakkuk. Here again the Church bears witness against the sloth and negligence of her sons of these latter days, by offering three chapters (all of rebuke and warning) to their thoughts ; three, you observe, out of sixty-seven, to be, as it were, *specimens* and hints of the mysterious, and, in many parts, obscure warnings contained in these divine books — and thereby pointing out to faithful Christians the necessity of studying them with care and humility ; of studying, I say, all the books of all these Prophets, instead of small portions only of three of them.

And now, with respect to the Prophet Habakkuk, to whose writings the Church this morning directs the thoughts of her members, we may observe, first, that this holy Prophet lived in the reign of the good King Josiah, when nevertheless the people of God were shamefully corrupted, and on the point of being punished for their sins.

We observe also that this sacred, though short book, is divided into two parts : the first containing the two first chapters, and the second the last chapter, there being but three chapters in all.

Of these, the first part is chiefly made up of solemn thoughts on God's mysterious judgment, in allowing so wicked a nation as that of the Chaldeans to be the scourge of his own chosen people.

The second part, or third chapter, is a psalm or hymn, well known to all careful readers of Scripture as one of the most sublime and magnificent, as well as consolatory chapters in the sacred volume.

In the first chapter, which is written in rather a desponding tone, the Prophet offers a sort of devout remonstrance to the LORD against what he saw was then, or soon would be, so prevalent,—the success and prosperity of the wicked, and the sufferings of God's faithful servants; wherein are many passages which greatly remind us of some of the Psalms, especially of the seventy-third Psalm, and also of the ninety-fourth.

“O LORD (says he) how long shall I cry,
And THOU wilt not hear?
Even cry out unto THEE of violence,
“And THOU wilt not save!”
“Therefore the Law is slacked,
And judgment doth never go forth.
For the wicked doth compass about the righteous,
Therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.”

And then, describing in a lofty strain of mysterious sacred poetry the power and achievements of the enemies of God's people, he thus expresses the true view which the faithful heart must take of such perplexing and trying dispensations.

“[Art] THOU not from everlasting,
O LORD, my GOD, mine HOLY ONE?
We shall not die.
O LORD, THOU hast ordained them for judgment,
And, O mighty GOD, THOU hast established them
for correction.
[THOU art] of purer eyes than to behold evil,
And canst not look on iniquity (perverseness).
Wherefore lookest THOU upon them that deal
treacherously?
Why holdest THOU Thy tongue when the wicked
devoureth [the man that is] more righteous than he?”

Such were the perplexing thoughts which harassed the minds of God's servants in ancient days. And so were they enabled to

see by faith that bad men are as it were God's scourges, "men of the LORD's hand," (as the Psalmist says) to chastise and amend those whom HE most delights in.

We too, Christians of these latter days, if we see the faithful servants of the LORD JESUS CHRIST, or at least those who strive and pray to be so, the worse off apparently for their religion, and deliberately ill treated by those who are far from being such consistent and upright Christians, then we are not to wonder at this; we are not to suppose that in God's sight the difference is small in the condition of these two parties—that prosperous wickedness is happiness, or distressed holiness misery—but we must say with the Prophet, whatever may be the outside appearance, "O mighty God! THOU hast ordained the wicked for the judgment and correction of Thy children. THOU from everlasting art of purer eyes than to behold evil," with any favour or allowance.

It is then matter of serious reflection, that persons who are leading wicked or wilfully thoughtless lives, or wilfully erring from the truth, are in a peculiar manner the instruments of the Divine chastisement, for the amendment of others who are disposed to serve their God faithfully; and this is (and is meant to be) a severe trial of a Christian's faith.

Thus, to mention one or two instances of every-day occurrence or common notoriety.

When a nation casts off God as England has done, as in other ways, so in decreeing that the holy ordinance of marriage shall be degraded to the level of a mere common bargain, witnessed by Poor Law guardians, and a registrar, and that not with so much ceremony as would be made for the meanest contract; doubtless, the tendency and effect of this, and other such measures, is to lead people by degrees, and not very slow degrees, to think that, after all, religion is of no such great consequence as they had been used to suppose, and that it is what may very well be dispensed with when it comes in the way.

Nevertheless, we may be sure that ALMIGHTY GOD is of purer eyes than to behold such profanation as this with approbation; HE cannot, possibly, bless such iniquity or "perverseness."

In His just judgment HE has permitted such unchristian laws to be enacted in our land. HE has suffered them to be established (as the Prophet says) for our correction, and to show the desolation in which we are.

Nevertheless, we ought not calmly to acquiesce in these miserable fruits of what is miscalled *reform*; but we ought to humble ourselves before the Divine Majesty, in shame and remorse for our past sins and wilful negligences, which have brought down on us so heavy a sign of God's displeasure.

So again with respect to the unhappy divisions, sects, and parties, by which the Christian faith in this our land is, as it were, torn to pieces: doubtless here also it is a great and dangerous mistake to think (as many even good sort of people do,) that such divisions are of small importance, and rather to be encouraged than otherwise; doubtless these also are another heavy sign of our desolation, and of God's displeasure against us. HE is not the author of confusion, but of peace. HE is of purer eyes than to behold such evil with favour. HE cannot look on such grievances with approbation.

We ought, then, to consider that God has (as the Prophet speaks) ordained these things, not because HE is pleased with them, or sheds His blessing on them; but for judgment, for warning and chastisement to the faithful members of His Church; for their correction HE has suffered division and disunion to be in a manner "established" among us, as it may seem, instead of our boasted "Establishment," as it is called.

The true Churchman must, therefore, arouse himself to meet his LORD's judgments and corrections in the spirit of a returning penitent. He must call to mind that the Church is a spiritual, not a political society. He must remember that Church principles are one thing, and a Church establishment another; the establishment may go, but the principles must stand; and that it is only for the sake of the principles that the establishment is of any value. Hence he sees the necessity, more than ever, of "endeavouring to keep the unity of the SPIRIT in the bond of peace," and, whenever that unity is broken, of taking it as part of God's judgment and correction, offered to the nation generally, and to himself in particular.

But chiefly, as offered to himself in particular, ought the true member of CHRIST'S Church to regard these Divine warnings. (For, as I said, the whole book of the Prophet is to be considered as belonging to the lesson.) It is of small use, perhaps I might say of no use at all, to go on complaining of the wickedness of the times, and of the bad way in which so many people live and die, in this which is called a Christian land.

Rather, instead of lamenting and complaining, we should set in earnest to the work of personal repentance and amendment, unless we think ourselves so good, as that we need neither to repent nor to amend. To mention one instance: supposing a quiet, well-disposed person lives amongst swearing, blaspheming, drunken, profligate, quarrelsome neighbours, (as is the case with some of us,) it is better, instead of merely lamenting the evil, to consider it as intended for our own judgment and correction.

Perhaps, if we had set them a better example, they might have been better.

Perhaps, if we had been consistent members of CHRIST'S holy Church, and endeavoured to have our practice suitable to our professions, our neighbours and relations also, now so often, alas! ordained for our judgment and correction, might have been to us sources of consolation and encouragement.

Perhaps, if our lives had been more holy, our prayers more earnest and regular, our sense of the value of Christian privileges more deep and substantial, those also with whom we are connected by the ties of kindred, or of neighbourhood, might have been the very opposite characters to what they now are; and, instead of disgracing, might have "adorned the doctrine of God our SAVIOUR in all things."

These are very painful and humiliating thoughts, especially to persons who have on their hearts a serious sense of the importance of Christian holiness, and at the same time a consciousness of their own fearful imperfections; and who have, besides this, a real earnest desire to improve, and to be what Christians ought to be. It is a painful thought, that we have so many faults of our own to answer for. More painful still to call to mind how many may be the worse for our evil or thoughtless conduct—for what good we have left undone, as well as for what wrong things

we have done—how many, many persons may be the worse off *for us*, both now, and eternally; this, I repeat, is painful and humiliating to reflect on.

The great LORD and Master, whom we call ours, is “of purer eyes than to behold evil, or to look on iniquity” with approbation.

Those who are going onward in such rash and headstrong courses are what may be called, according to the sacred expression of the Prophet, a “judgment” on the neighbourhood where they dwell. And if there be many such, so as to keep one another in countenance, then the scale of Christian morality, as it is called, is in men’s estimation set very low. Great crimes are accounted small errors, small errors (if there is any such thing) are accounted nothing, or even, perhaps, good qualities. Meanwhile, the strict severity of real Gospel holiness is set aside as altogether out of the question. The ancient discipline of the Church is utterly discarded; if mentioned, even by serious people, it is only in a whisper, as something which our forefathers ought to have been ashamed of. Somewhat like this is, without question, our condition at this day.

Who can doubt then, that, as a Christian nation, we are fallen, lost, and ruined; and, compared with the primitive Christians, have scarcely more than the name of a Church among us?

Still, amidst the ruin and confusion, there is hope in the words, “I will not make a full end.” The eye of the omniscient Shepherd is on His own sheep; “they hear His voice, HE knows them, and they follow HIM.” They follow HIM, though with shame, humiliation, and with what may be called a prostrate feeling of unworthiness. They follow HIM, in praying and striving more and more, from day to day, to be guided by His blessed heavenly example; they desire, like HIM, to be “of purer eyes than to behold evil, to look on iniquity” with approbation, or on our desolation with indifference. At the same time they cherish the tenderest compassion for all who are in error, knowing how greatly they will need mercy themselves in the day of account.

May the Holy Spirit of GOD enable us, my brethren, so to walk worthy of our high calling, that although our lot is fallen on

times when iniquity abounds, and the love of the many is waxed cold, we may yet, for the sake of the LORD JESUS CHRIST, who is our hope, be accounted worthy to escape all those things that shall come to pass, and to have our place before His dreadful tribunal, not on His left, but on His right hand.

SERMON CXXI.

GOD'S MERCY SHOULD MAKE US FEAR HIM.

PSALM CXXX. 3, 4.

"If THOU, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities; O LORD, who shall stand? But [there is] forgiveness with THEE, that THOU mayest be feared."

"If THOU, LORD, wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiss: O LORD, who may abide it? For there is mercy with THEE: therefore shalt THOU be feared."

It is recorded of an eminent person, who lived about two centuries ago, that when he was on his dying bed, he expressed his feelings to his friends in these remarkable words:—"I repent (said he) of all my life, except that part of it which I spent in communion with God, and in doing good."

He who said this was no wicked, irreligious person—quite otherwise; yet, on looking back on past years, and forward on that judgment which he should have to undergo, his natural feeling was, that he had wasted and misspent a great deal of precious time; that he had let slip innumerable opportunities of glorifying his heavenly Father; in short, that he could look with no comfort on the way in which he had been going on, when he compared what it was with what it might and ought to have been; all seemed to him in a manner lost and wasted which was not spent in direct communion with his God, or in doing some good or other to his fellow-Christians.

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Under the like feelings of genuine humility, we may well suppose the inspired Psalmist to have framed his beautiful one hundred and thirtieth Psalm: "Out of the depths have I cried unto THEE, O LORD: O LORD, hear my voice." A passage this, of which we may observe, that it seems to have been dwelt on with peculiar earnestness by the holy father Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, in Africa, who died more than fourteen hundred years ago; whose illustrious character is not unknown to those who have given attention to the history of the ancient Church:—

"We ought, each one of us, to consider (he says) in what a deep we are, out of which we must cry unto the LORD.

"Jonah cried out of the deep, even from the whale's belly. He was not only underneath the waves of the sea, but even in the bowels of the sea-monster; and yet not even that body and those waves could shut out or stop his prayer from reaching the ALMIGHTY; the belly of the whale could not keep back the voice of his supplication.

"No; this voice of prayer pierced all obstacles—burst through all—reached to the ears of God, if indeed it is right to say that it burst through all to reach to the ears of God, since they (the ears of God) were in the heart of him who offers the prayer. For where is not God present to him, whose voice is uttered in faith?

"But, as I said, (these are still the words of St. Augustine) we also ought to feel and understand from what a deep we must cry unto the Lord, for this mortal life is to us a deep. Whosoever, then, findeth himself sunk in the deep, crieth, groaneth, sigheth, until he may be rescued from the deep, and may come to HIM who sitteth above all depths, yea, above the cherubim, above all things which he hath created, not only things corporal but also things spiritual, until the soul comes to HIM; until HE set free that human nature (or form) in us which in this world's deep is as it were agitated and worn by incessant stormy waves, if it be not repaired and renewed by GOD, who framed it at the first—unless the soul, I say, be set free, it will be for ever in the deep.

"But when once a man crieth out of the deep, he riseth from the deep, and his very cry hindereth him from being in the *very*

lowest place. For they are indeed low in the deep, who do not cry from the deep.

“The Scripture saith (he continues), ‘a sinner despiseth when he cometh into a depth of evils¹.’”

[Now we observe here, that these words which occur in the Latin version of the Bible, used by St. Augustine, are differently translated, and probably more exactly with the original Hebrew, in our Bibles thus :—“When the wicked cometh, then cometh also contempt, and with ignominy reproach.” But the meaning of both seems to be the same, viz. to this effect, that persons of bad principle, if they are not made the better by the thought of their sins and wickedness, are made the worse, grow even into a scornful, reproachful temper towards ALMIGHTY GOD. And so St. Augustine goes on to explain it :—]

“Consider now, brethren, what a deep that must be where God is despised. When a man perceives himself to be overwhelmed with daily sins, pressed down with heaps and loads of iniquities, if a person tells him he ought to pray to God, he only laughs at him. Why (says he) if my life is so displeasing to God as you say, how comes it that HE lets me live? If God takes account of men’s actions, how comes it that I not only am alive, but am also prosperous and successful?

“For this is wont to be the unhappy condition of those who are low in the deep, and prosper in their iniquities.

“And the more happy and prosperous they appear to be, the more utterly are they overwhelmed; for a false, deceitful happiness, is, of all, the greatest unhappiness.

“Again, this also is what people will say or think. ‘I have done very many wicked things, and I am sure to be eternally lost, why then should I trouble myself to abstain from such or such a thing which I have a mind to?’

“The language this (says St. Augustine) of a desperate thief or murderer, who says, The punishment is the same whether I am convicted of ten, or five, or only one crime; therefore I will go on without fear or scruple.”

And to the same purpose, in his commentary on the fortieth Psalm :—“Those who cry out of the deep are not utterly *in*

¹ Prov. xviii. 3.

the deep. Others there are deeper in the deep, who yet do not feel themselves to be in the deep at all."

"Thus it is that 'the sinner despiseth when he is in a deep of evils.' Nevertheless the LORD JESUS CHRIST did not despise the depths in which we were sunk; He vouchsafed to come down into this our life, promising forgiveness of all sins. He aroused and startled man even from the deep, that from the deep he might cry under the heavy weight of his sins, and so the voice of the sinner might reach unto God.

"And now see how the voice of the sinner cries from the deep. 'Out of the deep have I called unto THEE, O LORD; LORD, hear my voice. O let THINE ears consider well the voice of my complaint.'

"Whence does he cry? Out of the deep. Who then is it that crieth? The sinner. And in what hope can he cry? Because HE who came to pay the penalty of our sins gave hope to the sinner, even when sunk in the deep. Therefore, what next follows? 'If THOU, LORD, wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O LORD, who may abide it?'

"Behold, he here sheweth what that deep is from which he crieth. It is from under the violent, overwhelming waves of his own iniquities that he crieth.

"He considers himself—he considers his past life—he sees it all covered over with sins and wickednesses; whichever way he turns his eyes, he finds in himself nothing that is good—no calm and peaceful spot of righteousness meets his view.

"And when he sees on all sides sins so many and so great—such bands (as it were) of his own iniquities rushing against him—he is fain to cry out like one in most fearful alarm, 'If THOU, LORD, shalt be extreme to mark iniquities, O LORD, who shall abide it?' He does not say, 'I shall not abide it,' but 'who shall abide it?' For he saw that almost all the life of man is terrified by his sins, that the consciences of all are accused by their own thoughts, that no heart is so pure as to presume on its own righteousness.

"And if so, then the heart of all can only trust to the mercy of God, and say, 'If THOU, LORD, wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O LORD, who shall abide it?'

"But what is the ground of hope? 'For there is mercy with THEE;' or (Latin Version), 'For there is with THEE a propitiation

or atonement.' And (asks St. Augustine) what is this propitiation, but a sacrifice? And what sacrifice can it be, but that which was offered for us? The innocent blood which was shed blotted out all the sins of those who had offended; so great a price was paid as to redeem all the captives from the hand of that enemy who carried them away captive.

"Therefore, there is mercy [or a propitiation or atonement] with THEE. For if there were not with THEE a propitiation [atonement], if THOU wert willing to be only a judge, and not willing to be merciful also, if THOU wert extreme to mark our iniquities, and to search them out, O LORD, who could abide it? Who could stand before THEE and say, 'I am innocent?' Who could stand at Thy judgment-seat? Our only hope therefore is—'For there is with THEE a propitiation.'"

Such is the eloquent commentary of this most holy father, and renowned Bishop of the ancient Church. It now only remains that we endeavour, by God's grace, to apply to our own real edification and amendment warnings and instructions offered to us on such high authority. For what, it may well be asked, can be higher authority than the words of ALMIGHTY GOD Himself, speaking in His Scripture, and explained and illustrated for us by the primitive bishops, saints, and martyrs of the Christian Church?

It is evident that the writer of this one hundred and thirtieth Psalm, whether it were King David or some later prophet (but most probably it was King David), was, like St. Augustine, of that humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient disposition, which, as St. Peter says, is in the sight of GOD of great price. Men they were second to none in wisdom, zeal, and unwearied diligence in the service of ALMIGHTY GOD, yet withal so lowly-minded and self-distrustful, so deeply impressed with a sense of the Divine perfections and their own unworthiness, that they would have fully sympathized with that humble penitent before spoken of, who expressed his sense of our condition so naturally (if one may so apply the word) when he said, 'I repent of all my life, except what I spent in communion with God, and in doing good.'

So like the tone of the inspired Psalmist, under the like sense of his imperfection, "If THOU, LORD, shouldest mark iniquity, O LORD, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with THEE, that THOU mayest be *feared*."

"If THOU, LORD, shouldest mark iniquity." What, then? does HE not mark iniquity? Yes, certainly; "God shall bring every work into judgment." "Of every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment;" yea, of every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil, man shall give account before HIM who is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The meaning therefore cannot be, that our Heavenly FATHER takes no account of our faults and sins, for to say this would be to go contrary to the whole tenour of the Divine revelation.

But what the HOLY SPIRIT would here set before the thoughts of men is, our extreme and pitiable imperfection; and this (as we shall, I trust, presently see), not in order that we may go on quietly and fearlessly in sinful or thoughtless ways, but that we may be led, by the consideration of His mercy, to fear HIM, that so (as St. Paul says) "the goodness of God may lead us to *repentance*."

For, continues the holy Psalmist, "there is forgiveness with THEE;" "forgiveness," mercy [our translation]; a propitiation [Saint Augustine]; there *is* forgiveness. You see, the expression implies the preciousness, and therefore the difficulty, of obtaining so great, so inestimable a blessing.

Once for all, the LORD JESUS appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of HIMSELF. Once for all, as many of us as were baptized into CHRIST have put on CHRIST. For as there is but one LORD and one faith, so there is but one Baptism, and that of repentance for the remission of sins. But then after forgiveness of sins in holy Baptism, how too often has it been and is with Christian people, that it "happens unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." But then, reasons the Apostle in that same startling passage, "If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the

knowledge of the LORD and SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning."

Such warnings as these are startling, and are meant to be so. They are meant to waken the drowsy, to alarm the self-confident, and to humble and keep down low in the dust even the sincerest and most devoted of God's children.

Nevertheless, they need not despair, no, not even the most thoughtless, and the most abandoned; provided only that they turn without delay from their evil ways, their worldly, thoughtless, presumptuous confidence, and endeavour in earnest to correct and amend whatever they find amiss in themselves, in the state of their hearts, and the course of their practice.

For such, you see, is the holy Psalmist's reasoning—"There is forgiveness with THEE, therefore shalt THOU be feared." As St. Paul, in a passage before mentioned, urged the goodness of GOD as a motive, not (as some might expect) for hope and confidence, but for repentance—"The goodness of GOD leadeth thee to repentance,"—so here the same doctrine is taught us by the HOLY SPIRIT: because GOD is merciful, therefore we ought to fear HIM. We might have expected that he would have said, There is mercy with THEE; therefore shalt THOU be trusted, loved, and adored,—and so of course it might; nevertheless, the word is—"therefore shalt THOU be feared," or, "that THOU mayest be feared." And this surely is a truth of great importance, to be dwelt on by all persons who do not wish to delude themselves with false pretences, and to say to their souls, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace, saith the LORD GOD."

As, for instance, when the most humble and devoted of God's saints can look upon themselves only with shame and remorse, at one time saying, 'I repent of all my life, but that part of it which I spent in communion with GOD, and in doing good;' and at another, of the best and holiest of their actions, 'They be good works, if they be sprinkled with the blood of CHRIST, and not otherwise¹:' when this is the lowly frame of mind of the most devoted Christians, what can we think of ourselves, too often

¹ See the Life of Mr. G. Herbert.

inclined, the best of us, it is to be feared, to be comfortable and easy amidst a mass of grievous imperfections, not to say sins and errors of a very fearful kind?

I speak not now of persons who are going in a deliberate course of profligacy, or open violation of God's law, in fraud or dishonesty, in sins of intemperance or uncleanness, in malice or envy; because habits of this kind, when known, and allowed, and persevered in, are so contrary to the Gospel of CHRIST, that no person whatever can imagine that it is safe to continue in them unto their life's end. And, therefore, persons who deliberately go on in these ways, do one of two things: either they pretend to deny and disbelieve the Gospel, or else they comfort themselves with the assurance, that of course they do not intend to keep on in those evil ways always; they mean to be very different persons, quite changed characters before long, or at least in plenty of time. Such persons forget that in so doing they provoke as it were the ALMIGHTY to His face—they go the way to make HIM withdraw His grace utterly from them—they contradict His very word, and say "There is mercy with THEE, therefore shalt THOU *not* be feared."

But it were well if we were only in danger in respect of open sins and deliberate defiance of ALMIGHTY GOD.

How faint is our sense, even at the best, of our real position with regard to HIM—of the extreme malignity of our sins and imperfections—of the depth of His mercy for us—of the return we ought to make for that mercy.

If a person goes on through life, or for many years, doing nothing whatever for the sake of JESUS CHRIST, and leading just such a life as a quiet, steady moral Heathen might do, we know that such persons are not much, or not at all, I should say, the worse thought of, for their disregard of what is called religion; and because others are satisfied with them, therefore they too are satisfied with themselves. Yet all the while, either the Gospel of the LORD JESUS CHRIST must be all a fable, or persons who lead this kind of hard irreligious life must be in the way to be cast off eternally. The world may treat them with respect, or even admiration; but in the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST, if they will look into it without partiality, they will find themselves

differently described ; and by the Gospel, not by the world, they must be judged in the last day.

If, again, persons lead the life of what is called men of business—if fathers and mothers of families devote their whole time to domestic cares and anxieties, so as literally not to have sufficient time for religion (as the phrase is), have they not reason to apprehend that they are too ready to trust to excuses, that their supposed love for God (for perhaps it is but supposed) has made them too much inclined to be presumptuous, easy, and confident? very different from the confession of the holy penitent—“There is mercy with thee, therefore shalt Thou be feared.”

And to mention only one other consideration—the disputes and dissensions which now for a long time past have sadly torn in pieces the holy Catholic and Apostolic Church; what are these very often owing to, but to the presumptuousness and over confidence of zealous persons, who, too much forgetting their own frailty and imperfection, will, without scruple, pass a heavy judgment on their brethren; and having no fears for themselves, will treat those whom they think in error with such bitterness and scorn, as all serious and thoughtful persons, however differing on other points, must agree in lamenting and deprecating from the bottom of their hearts?

The conclusion of the whole matter seems to be, that we should all endeavour more and more to feel and acknowledge our own deficiencies, our sins, negligences, and ignorances; and then to set in earnest about “leading a new life,” as we learnt in the Catechism. Because, to go on as we have been without trying to grow better, may indeed satisfy other people, and ourselves too; but still the awful question remains, whether we are indeed such as our LORD, MASTER, and REDEEMER will acknowledge as His, in the day when HE makes up His jewels?

SERMON CXXII.

NONE SHALL ESCAPE GOD'S JUDGMENT.

ROM. xiv. 11.

“As I live, saith the LORD, every knee shall bow to ME, and every tongue shall confess to GOD.”

WHEN our LORD and SAVIOUR was put on His trial as a blasphemer before the Sanhedrim, or great council of the Jews, HE for some time made no answer to the many calumnies which were heaped on HIM. At length, when the HIGH PRIEST stood up, and, whether in scorn or in wrath, said—“I adjure THEE by the living God, that THOU tell us whether THOU be the CHRIST, the SON of GOD,”—then, though HE knew all things which should come upon HIM, HE would not shrink from declaring the awful truth of His own Divine nature—“JESUS saith unto him, Thou hast said, I AM”—I am the MESSIAH, the eternal SON of GOD. “Nevertheless,” notwithstanding the low and degraded state in which you now see me, standing before your tribunal as a criminal, persecuted, forsaken, insulted, and to all appearance cast off by GOD and man,—nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye yourselves see fulfilled in me the ancient prophecy of Daniel [chap. vii.], “ye shall see the SON of Man, the incarnate WORD, sitting on the right hand of Power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” Whereupon the High Priest rent his clothes, saying, “HE hath spoken blasphemy; what further need

have we of witnesses? And they all condemned HIM to be guilty of death."

This is one case; let us now look to another. We are Christians by profession, and, as such, we all know and acknowledge that our eyes shall some time or other be witnesses to great and astonishing events—to such displays of the power and majesty of ALMIGHTY GOD, as the world has not yet seen.

Every one knows this, however little they may reflect on it; but every one, I say, *knows*, that a day of final judgment is drawing on, when this world of trial and probation shall be put an end to—when the LORD JESUS shall sit on the throne of His glory, thousand thousands ministering unto HIM, and ten thousand times ten thousand standing before HIM; when the righteous shall be admitted to shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their FATHER, and the wicked shall be compelled to acknowledge HIM for their Judge, whom they have, through life, refused to love as their SAVIOUR, or to obey as their MASTER and LORD.

These things, I say, we know; as Christians we cannot, we dare not deny them. But it more deeply concerns us, by a close and serious examination of our own hearts, to ascertain whether or not we are really prepared to meet those great events; whether (though we may not venture to scorn or deny HIM, as the Jewish rulers did), whether our love and obedience towards the holy JESUS is now such as in that dread hour shall entitle us, through the atonement of His blood, to His merciful acceptance and eternal rewards.

"Every knee," we know, "shall bow to HIM," then, in terror, however now it may be proof against His love. Every tongue shall then confess the justice and majesty of our SAVIOUR GOD, however now we may practically refuse to acknowledge His infinite mercy, and our own infinite need of it.

There is plainly a notion very much abroad in the world, and in more or less degrees acted on by vast numbers of Christians; that if they can forget GOD, GOD will forget them; that is, if they can contrive to keep religion out of their thoughts, there will be an end of the matter, and they shall hear no more about it.

This notion is indulged and acted upon (I say) not entirely, but in various degrees, more or less, by great numbers of people

in these days. And these numbers are not at all likely to grow less, but rather to increase, in proportion as wild fancies and imaginations of all shapes and colours (as one may say) are dignified in common speech, and therefore in common opinion, with the sacred names of religion and the Gospel.

For in such a mixture and confusion of notions and professions, where some of course *must* be wrong, it is but a slight step further to say that perhaps *all* are wrong; or at least, that it is out of *our* power to distinguish what is right; at all events, that we cannot do so without spending a great deal of time and trouble on the matter;—and so people say, they must go on as they are, and hope for the best—hope that somehow or other they shall come right at last.

Thus unwilling are the generality of persons to be put at all out of their way, or to take any considerable pains or trouble about truth and duty.

Yet, “As I live, saith the LORD, every knee *shall* bow to ME;” the time shall come when all shall confess that Christian truth and Christian duty were matters of far more consequence, far more value, than any thing else whatever, which is now thought worthy to occupy the time, and absorb the care of mortal man.

What then I would wish, by the aid of God's sacred SPIRIT, to lead your thoughts to, is this plain consideration: that, however neglectful and indifferent a person may be about religious truth during this his probationary life, yet for this his neglect and indifference he must at last render a severe account, and confess himself miserably and shamefully self-deceived.

The proud and haughty members of the Jews' Sanhedrim, when they heard the despised JESUS of Nazareth avow HIMSELF to be the MESSIAH, the eternal SON of GOD, immediately condemned HIM as a blasphemer. Yet the time is coming, we know, when these very men shall see HIM coming in the clouds of Heaven with power and great glory. Before HIM Annas and Caiaphas, Pilate and Herod, shall bow down, and cry for mercy to HIM whom they treated as the vilest and most degraded of the sons of men, though HE were in truth, all the while, their SAVIOUR and JUDGE.

Of Pilate indeed it may reasonably be supposed, that some

natural feelings of compassion came over him, when in his desire of popular approbation, he released Barabbas to the multitude, but "delivered JESUS to their will." But with respect to all the rest, their conduct towards our blessed LORD seems to be marked with nothing but cruelty and insult, of what may be almost called a savage and ferocious kind, of which a good many instances are recorded in the inspired histories.

It never entered their thoughts that for this they must at last be called to account; and called to account by HIM whom they had bound before them, as the most abject of slaves and criminals.

But why, it may be asked, should they be answerable for this? How could they possibly know that the despised JESUS of Galilee was indeed no other than the CHRIST, the SAVIOUR of the world, the incarnate SON of GOD, HIMSELF over all, GOD blessed for ever?

We reply, they might not, or perhaps could not, at once have known the whole of this great mysterious truth; but they might have had the mind and disposition to know it, if it were indeed the truth.

They might have known, if they would have taken the trouble to inquire, that His life was uniformly spotless, innocent, and holy; that His actions were of so remarkable a kind, that any one who considered them at all candidly, must at once acknowledge HIM, at the least, "a teacher come from GOD, for no man could do the miracles which HE did, unless GOD were with HIM;" and yet, wonderful as these actions were, as being out of the common way and order of things, *i. e.* as miracles, they were scarcely less wonderful as evidences of the tenderest sympathy and compassion for human suffering in every form and degree. Moreover, these same Jews might, and must have known, that the doctrine taught by the despised JESUS of Nazareth was always such as tended to encourage His hearers in all good and holy practice, that HE ever appealed to their Scriptures, and desired them to search them, "for they (said HE) testify of me."

In short, whether they looked to His words, or His conduct, or to the circumstances of His history altogether, the more they examined and inquired with humility and reverence, the more reason would they have found to acknowledge, with the zealous Apostle, "Thou art the CHRIST, the SON of the Living God."

But the Jews did nothing of all this; they neither knew the truth, nor wished to know it. Having no thought or intention of becoming disciples of such a Master, their only anxiety was for some specious pretences to get rid of HIM. And this, so far as lay in their power, they accomplished. But we know that HE whom they so unrighteously condemned, shall HIMSELF (as HE told them) come to be their Judge; "every eye shall see HIM, and they also which pierced HIM;" every knee shall bow to HIM, and among them, those which were bent to HIM in mockery, in the hour of His shame and agony; the day will come, when they shall again bow, in terror and remorse.

Thus you see the Jews of old time, though so careless and insensible about the value of God's truth, shall at last be brought to confess its infinite importance. And does not the same rule apply to Christians? If we are careless and indifferent about the knowledge of divine things, are we so certain that we shall escape for this our negligence, wilful and inexcusable as it too often is? shall we not be called to account for it? shall not every knee bow before that Name which is above every name? shall not every tongue confess to that Truth, to which the eternal Son of God came into the world to bear witness? This is a point to be considered.

A good many persons there are, and the number is probably increasing, who, almost unknown to themselves, as I may say, are withdrawing themselves altogether from the obligations of the Christian covenant; and, I may say, almost from the profession and name of Christians. But, as I said, they are not aware of their condition in this respect.

We all know that people talk and act as if in religion they had a right to choose for themselves; or, rather, as if they should not be called to account for the choice they make.

They forget that human laws and divine laws are not of necessity the same: that sometimes man may condemn, where God approves; and again, at other times, the ALMIGHTY may be greatly displeased, where man approves, or even rewards.

One consequence of this is, that persons, not being answerable to human authority for their behaviour on many occasions of very

serious importance, are disposed to be very easy and quiet in their consciences on such occasions; it never enters their thoughts that they have any reason to blame themselves.

Thus, to instance in two or three cases of very common occurrence—

There are not many persons who like to set themselves up for infidels or absolute unbelievers, for reasons which may be easily imagined. Some of these reasons relate to matters of worldly interest; but, besides this, there is in the human heart, even perhaps when most hardened, a secret consciousness of the presence of an all-seeing God, and of a judgment to come; at least the people of this country have never as yet been given over to that open, blasphemous renunciation of ALMIGHTY GOD and His truth, which prevailed in a neighbouring country some years ago, the effects of which, having spread far and wide, are sadly felt to this very day.

Whether in God's just judgment such an antichristian spirit shall be suffered to gain the ascendancy in this nation, is more than the wisest of men can pronounce. "Not for our righteousness, or for the uprightness of our hearts," shall so terrible a calamity be averted from us.

But this we may say of too many persons in Christian England, if they are not infidels and unbelievers, what are they?

If they were asked whether their cares and thoughts were directed to things eternal, rather than to things temporal, they would themselves at once answer, No; for they were no hypocrites. If they were asked whether they attend at the LORD's consecrated House, the Church; or even at a meeting-house occasionally, the answer must be, No; nowhere, except now and then, by chance, at a funeral, &c.

If they were asked whether they were in the custom of having family prayers, they must say they never thought, nor dreamt of any thing of the kind, nor ever mean to.

If, again, they were asked whether they are in the habit of using private prayer, they must say they never do. In their childhood, perhaps, their mother taught them to say the LORD's Prayer, and the Belief; but they have forgotten both long ago.

If they were asked how they are in the habit of spending Sunday, they would or must answer, partly in settling matters of

accounts, or other business, partly in discussing matters of politics, and reading newspapers, partly in idle gossiping conversation; not unfrequently, perhaps, in sins against soberness, temperance, and chastity.

To other similar questions like answers must be returned. Yet persons who go on for years in this kind of way profess and call themselves Christians. Nevertheless, the question may be asked, If they are not infidels, what are they? Human laws do not touch them. Whether they are in high station or low, they have a respectable place in society, at least, not the less respectable for their want of religion; and when they come to die, though good people may silently deplore their worse than infidel lives, the world passes them off with phrases of approbation, as persons free from bigotry, kind-hearted, liberal, and other words, which, if they mean any thing, mean that a person has lived a free life, free from the restraints of the Gospel of CHRIST.

Nevertheless, "As I live, saith the LORD, every knee shall bow to ME." He who now shelters himself under the name of a Christian, and yet honours not the house, the name, nor the ordinances of CHRIST, shall find in that day, that GOD will not be mocked with impunity, that an account shall surely be demanded for all such presumptuous and wilful negligence of Divine truth.

In like manner, when persons profess themselves to be religious, and yet, at the same time, to be indifferent about religious Truth—to "have no objection" (as the expression is) to the most sacred doctrines or ordinances, and yet to have no deep reverence for them, as founded in Divine truth; to approve of one form of worship or system of faith as much as of another; to take no pains to obtain a right understanding of GOD's Holy Word, and of the ancient rules and formularies of the Christian Church;—all these things are indications of a light trifling temper, of a want of seriousness on the most important of all subjects.

These things show that the heart is not yet by any means brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. The fear of the world is still too strong in it; the fear of being scorned, and disliked, and shunned as bigots, high church, papists, and many more such names, such as all sincere Christians must be content

to wear quietly and contentedly, if need be. The truth is, in the religious liberty we enjoy in this country, and for which, in some respects, we have great cause to be thankful, there is, however, this danger to us all, whether Church people or dissenters,—there is, I say, this danger: that people do not endeavour to live up strictly to their professions, whatever they may be. They are too much inclined to shift and change about, to mind what other people do, to be satisfied if they can get on without being laughed at as singular, over-strict, bigoted, &c.; forgetting all the while, that whatever our profession may be, it ought to be consistent with what in conscience we believe to be true; and what in conscience we believe to be true, we ought most earnestly to endeavour to act up to.

The world, indeed, will let us off on much easier terms; for the world is, and ever was, opposed to the doctrine of the Cross, the necessity of a life of holy self-denial, and self-renunciation. But it is not to the world to whom our last account must be rendered. “To ME, saith the LORD, every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.”

In conclusion, then, we may only entreat all seriously-disposed persons to put it to their consciences, of what importance it is that all our thoughts and views of religious truth should be taken up with reverence, and as in the presence of our Judge.

If the Jews and Romans had attended to this rule, they would not have brought on themselves the heavy guilt of crucifying the LORD of Glory.

If Christians in various ages since had approached God's truth in this serious and reverential frame of mind, the Church of CHRIST would not have suffered, as it has and does suffer, from false doctrine, heresy, and schism, in so unnumbered forms and degrees.

In our thoughts of religion, as well as in our words and deeds relating to it, we should look on to the time, when every knee, willing or unwilling, shall bow to the LORD JESUS, every tongue shall confess HIM: when we, too, shall look on HIM, Whom, alas! we have too often pierced by our sins, negligences, and wilful ignorances.

We ought not to consider religious subjects as matters of tem-

porary discussion, argument, or mere conversation, nor ought we to read religious books with any such view.

Rather, it is a solemn duty incumbent on us all, and of which we are none of us, perhaps, sufficiently aware, to make a conscience of our thoughts, opinions, and views on these great subjects.

For these subjects are great, touching, and important to every single individual, equally, not to one more than another.

The great truths of the Gospel are not such as any person can reasonably set aside; no person can say, They do not concern me; I shall not trouble myself to inquire about them; whether the truth be here or there, I neither know, nor care to ascertain.

Now, when people so generally think and act in this kind of manner, it is more necessary, as it is more difficult, for those who are in earnest in their religion to keep a guard on themselves in this respect. For, whatever the world may say or think, we shall certainly have to answer at last for our thoughts and opinions, as well as for our deeds and words.

Hence we see how necessary it is for us to be serious and in earnest in all our thoughts about religious subjects, and in reading or hearing religious books. Possibly we may be mistaken occasionally in some of our opinions; still, if the heart be humble, reverential, devout, and teachable, by degrees, no doubt, more light will be granted to us; the blessed influence of God's HOLY SPIRIT will preserve us at least from fatal errors; and, if even at the best in this world we are permitted to see things spiritual but as through a glass, darkly, and by reflection, yet, if we indeed strive to be what we ought to be, we may venture to look forward with hope to that day when we shall feel that to be true, which we so often acknowledge—"That in the knowledge of God standeth our eternal life, and in His service is perfect freedom."

SERMON CXXIII.

WATCHING FOR THE UNKNOWN DAY.

ST. MARK xiii. 33.

“ Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.”

WHEN people expect any thing to happen to them, for which they know they ought to prepare themselves, they naturally begin presently to inquire, *when* it is likely to come to pass,—they want to know the exact time. And when they do come to know it, very often it becomes a snare to them. The indolent, slothful, careless disposition, which is but too natural to all men since the sin of our first parents, causes us too often to put off those duties for which we do not expect, for a long time, to be called to account. A child, for example, knows the precise time when he will be called on to say his lesson; and we know how apt he is, therefore, to delay learning it until it is very near the time: a labourer knows that he has a certain piece of work to get through by such an hour, and he lets that hour come on as near as he dares before he begins to work in earnest at all. Many other instances might be given: but these will be sufficient to make you understand that there may be a spiritual sloth also, extremely dangerous to the soul of man, showing itself in this particular form; that people think they know, more or less, how much time God will allow them, and so think they need not take pains until they are, as they suppose, come near to the end of that time. It would greatly terrify them, could they be convinced that they

were really on the edge of the world which never ends, so unprepared as they know themselves to be ; but they too easily contrive to persuade themselves that they are as yet far enough from that world ; that they may sleep, or trifle, or riot on a little more, and yet there will be time sufficient for them to do all their work in.

By this we may understand how great a mercy it is that our SAVIOUR has hid from us the exact time of the Last Day, as HE has that of our own death. How carefully and strictly HE has concealed the time when HE will come to be our Judge, very many places in the Bible inform us. The Day of the LORD—it was a proverb among Christians—the Day of the LORD so cometh as a thief in the night. Our LORD Himself taught people this saying, where HE says, “ This know, that if the good man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also ; for in such an hour as ye think not the SON of Man cometh.” St. Peter and St. Paul both took this Parable from HIM. St. Peter, to reprove the unbelief of certain scoffers, says, “ But the day of the LORD will come as a thief in the night : when the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat : the earth also, and all the works that are therein, shall be burned up.” And St. Paul puts them in mind of it, as of a thing they could not be ignorant of : “ Of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you ; for when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child ; and they shall not escape.”

But the most remarkable and mysterious place, to show how the ALMIGHTY on purpose hides from us that awful time, is the verse just before the text. “ Of that day and that hour knoweth no man ; no, not the Angels which are in Heaven, neither the SON, but the FATHER.” Not even the SON knows it, in that HE is the SON of Man ; it is no part of His Prophetic Mission : as some things were not known to HIM when HE grew in wisdom and stature, so neither was this, even to the day when HE uttered this prophecy to His Disciples. Such seems to be, in part, the meaning of those remarkable words ; but however, it seems plain

that God has some awful purpose connected with His judgments on the wicked, and on that world which has become accursed through them, which makes it necessary to hide the time of judgment. But in the text a more merciful purpose too is not doubtfully declared : "Take ye heed, watch and pray; for ye know not when the time is." The time is concealed, on purpose to take away the temptation which I have just mentioned: it is kept back, that people might not, in their irreligious foolishness, fancy that it was far off, and time enough to get ready for it. Just as God, in His good Providence, hides from us the time of our own death, so in the Gospel of His Son HE hides from us the time of the Day of Judgment. We know that when persons have reason to think they shall be sent out of the world on this or that particular day, it often *seems* to work a change in them for the better, as the day draws on; they seem more tender-hearted, and listen more attentively to the warnings of God's Messengers. But still there is no knowing whether such repentance is real or not. We may have a faint hope, but we cannot at all depend on it. In like manner, had we been enabled to foreknow exactly when God will call us out of this state of trial, even if the thought did make us more serious as the time drew on, yet there would be less and less chance of a really good and hopeful repentance, less and less trial of our faith. The seriousness might be a kind of astounding fear, such as seems, alas! to fill the hearts of too many when they are on their death-bed, and to render them even incapable, as far as we can discern, of any real and abiding change of heart. But now the uncertainty of the time of our death leaves us in a manner more at liberty to think of death, or not, as we like; to prepare for it or not, according as we choose rather to attend to the counsels of GOD ALMIGHTY, or to the corrupt whisperers of the world, the flesh, and the Devil. God graciously leaves us to choose right for ourselves; that is, of course, by the help of His bountiful grace: but if we knew the exact time to be near, we should hardly be in a condition to choose: if we knew it to be what we call afar off, we should hardly, I fear, be minded to choose right.

And yet, in a certain sense, the ALMIGHTY has made known to us both the hour of death and also the Day of Judgment. HE has hidden the exact hour and day, but HE has set down certain

limits, beyond which HE has assured us they cannot be delayed. We know that the days of man, which were at first near a thousand years, and seem afterwards to have lessened by degrees, are now come down, taking one life with another, to seventy at the outside. "The days of our age are threescore years and ten; and though men be so strong that they come to fourscore years, yet is their strength then but labour and sorrow, so soon passeth it away, and we are gone." As much as to say, that they who shall live longest must not reckon upon living beyond seventy; and even if they do, must not reckon upon doing more of their life's work, making their account more favourable, after that time; for then they must expect to fail both in mind and body. Thus, though no person living can say exactly in what year he shall die, yet we can all certainly name a year, in which every one of us now living will be out of this world, and waiting for their last account, if they have not already come to it. To make sure of taking it far enough off, let us say a hundred and fifty years. A hundred and fifty years hence, we may feel certain, every one of us, and all our brethren, who are now breathing the air of this world, will have ceased to do so,—their souls will have been parted from their bodies, and they will be in the region where is no repentance, nor any such prayer as can change an evil lot to a good one. Can we not imagine *this* to ourselves, if we will have a little faith, as easily as a person condemned to die can realize to himself where he shall be this day month, or fortnight, or week? Surely, if we will, we may: not that in any case it is an easy matter to throw our hearts and minds forward, and in hope or fear imagine ourselves in the Paradise of God, or in the prisons of darkness; it is not an easy matter for men unaccustomed to such meditations: but it may be done, by God's grace and help; we may, if we choose, employ our leisure hours—the hours, for example, that we lie awake in our beds—in musing what our condition must needs be, when a hundred or a hundred and fifty years more shall have passed over this world, if it last so long. We shall either rest with Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, or with the rich man we shall lift up our eyes, being in torments. We shall be with CHRIST, which is far better than even an Apostle's condition in this imperfect world; or we shall be with the souls of the unrighteous, reserved unto the Day of Judgment to be punished.

Though we can none of us say at all on what day this will begin to be our state, yet we can presently, any one of us, name a day, which, when it comes, will find us in one or the other of these conditions.

And as it is with regard to our own lives, so also, in some measure, with regard to the Day of Judgment. Neither man nor angel knows exactly when it will be; yet certain events are foretold, a course of things is declared in the writings of the Apostles, which having come to pass, the end will very soon come. As GOD has given us tokens, which all men understand, of the gradual approach of the unknown hour of death, so has HE given tokens, plain enough to believers, of the no less certain, yet more silent and gradual, approach of the unknown Day of Judgment. The tokens of coming death, all men know, are the changes which befall the bodies and minds of men—our hair turns grey, our strength decays, our sight, hearing, speech, is apt to fail us; our limbs tremble, our energy and activity is gone; we cannot remember things as we used to do. In like manner there are tokens of the old age of the world, such as are described in the prophecies of our LORD and of St. John: great afflictions, false Christs and false prophets, wars and rumours of wars, famines and troubles, the truth persecuted, iniquity abounding, the love of the greater part waxing cold. Whenever we see any of these things,—and surely the youngest and the most inconsiderate of us all must have seen and heard of too much of this sort of sign,—we see a token of the coming of our LORD, as surely as we see in grey hairs a token of old age in any particular person. A great deal of the news that many of us listen after, and read so eagerly, is such as ought to put us in mind continually that the coming of the LORD draweth nigh: that, as it is in one of the books called Apocryphal, “the world hath lost its youth, and the times begin to wax old.”

Now what the use of such decay in each particular person is, we see very well: namely, that being reminded by it how soon he himself shall be dust and ashes, he should make haste to wean himself from a world, in which his stay will be so short; and, in like manner, when we see by the prophecies the sure decay and end of the world itself, and of all the great things in it, this ought to make us very careful, not to be carried away by any of

those things : not to set our hearts upon any thing, not to seek to be happy in any thing, except what we have reasonable hope will stand the fire of the Day of Judgment. Every war, every plague, every disturbance in a country, every bad season, every gross wickedness, is a token of the coming of our LORD, a reason why we should set our faces towards HIM.

Thus our faith is, in one sense, helped by the very things, which in another way try it most severely. The wickedness of the world, and the love of most waxing cold, is a great temptation of course to us all : but let us look at it with an eye of faith, and we shall see in it a sign of CHRIST's coming to judgment : that great event, the expectation of which, more than any thing besides, must help him who recollects it to resist temptation.

Our LORD has taught us, by the parable which presently follows the text, how we should ever have our eyes and ears open, and see and hear every thing with a relation towards that great day. We should never consider any thing barely as it is itself, but always how far such and such an use of it will turn to our good or harm in the Day of Judgment. He compares HIMSELF to a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. HE is indeed gone a far journey, into Heaven, the Heaven of Heavens, the very throne of God. HE is far away out of our sight, and the time of His return is uncertain. HE left it so on purpose, that we might be always ready. The time of His return is quite uncertain, but our work and duty is not at all so. HE has left it quite plain : HE gave authority to His servants, and to every man his work : that is, HE set over the rest the Ministers of His Holy Word and Sacraments, and assigned both to them and to us all certain duties, which HE would have us be doing when HE comes again. HE assigned to most men the honest labour of their hands ; to children, dutiful obedience to their parents, and to all who are in their parents' place ; to servants, that they should be faithful to their masters ; to masters, that they should be careful of their servants ; to the rich, that they should be open-hearted ; to the poor, contented ; to the young, that they keep themselves pure, humble, sober-minded ; to the old, that they daily exercise themselves more and more in those graces, and in penitence for former

breaches of them :—this is the kind of work which the Master of our House, the Church, has given to every one of us ; and HE has especially commanded the porters, those who stand in the Apostles' place, keeping the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, these HE has especially commanded to watch. And not them only, but the word “ watch,” which is said especially to them for all our sakes, is said also to every one of the household for his own sake. Every one, besides his own proper business in the family, has this command given him, to be watching and waiting for his LORD, to be attentive and awake at all times, that he be not found sleeping at that particular time when his LORD shall return to call him to account.

If we were literally and outwardly so situated as our LORD has supposed in this parable, if our condition was that of servants, waiting in the night for an earthly master, and if our mind was that of loyal and dutiful servants, willing to please him, what would our conduct be? Should we not be continually looking up, and lifting up our heads when we began to grow weary, and running to the door, and watching every sound, whether we could distinguish his step at a distance? Should we not count the hours and watches of the night, from even till midnight, from midnight until cock-crowing, and from cock-crowing until the morning? Should we not keep our loins girded, our dress in order, and our lights burning, and feel afraid and ashamed at the thought of his coming suddenly and finding us sleeping? Would it not stay our sharp words, our dishonest deeds, our boisterous sports, our wanton liberties, our idle curiosity, our thoughtless neglect of our tasks? Should we be glad for our master, coming (as HE will) without warning, to hear us speaking unkindly and railing at one another, the first thing when he opens the door? Had we not rather he found us busy about his work, than employed on our own selfish pleasure, diverting ourselves, with little or no care who are put out of their way by it, or how his business is neglected? And of course, above all things, we should be unwilling for him to find us in the act of dishonestly taking what was either his or the property of a fellow-servant : we should sink into the earth rather than be found in any kind of impurity or unchastity, in rioting and drunkenness, in chambering and wantonness. And though we were free from such

gross sins, yet surely we should not choose for HIM to come, when our whole mind and thoughts were taken up with unprofitable fancies, childish inquiry into matters which have no concern to His service or our duty. All these things would naturally be avoided, by servants really watching for their Lord, as well as that general irreligion, which HE here calls going to sleep.

Now, are we avoiding them all? Here is another Advent come, a solemn time for humbling ourselves in preparation for another Christmas: and we are so much nearer the great and dreadful Day. Have we made any good and sufficient preparation for it? Are we in a way to do so? Have we waked up? Are we looking about us? Are our loins girded about, and our lights burning? Or are we rather going on in an idle, careless, self-satisfied way, as if we had found out some way to be safe without continual watching and prayer; as if we might safely be unconcerned, while every year that passes by, every clock that strikes, every sun that sets, nay, every breath that we draw, has a voice given it from GOD to warn us of approaching judgment? Friends, neighbours, Christian brethren, I beseech you think on these things; for, depend on it, the best of us has a great deal to do, and the youngest will find he has but a short time.

SERMON CXXIV.

PRAYER FOR WISDOM.

ST. JAMES i. 5, 6.

“If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of GOD, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.”

WHEN the Scriptures speak of wisdom, they almost always mean *spiritual* wisdom: that kind of knowledge and good sense, by which men are aware what to do, in order to be fit for eternal life hereafter. What the world means by wisdom—the becoming great and rich, and knowing how to obtain most enjoyment for one's self,—this is no part of the wisdom of the Bible. But a right sense of practical matters, judging truly which are trifles and which are of real consequence, what will please GOD and what will displease HIM—this is indeed wisdom: this is what makes men wise unto salvation.

Now St. James here in the text supposes a person so far in earnest, as to desire the knowledge of the way to please his Maker. Such a person will presently find, that, left to himself, he greatly lacks wisdom—he is far from knowing clearly, on each occasion, what he must do, in order to please GOD; what thoughts, words, and actions will best prepare him to be happy in Heaven. The Apostle, I say, supposes a man aware of his own blindness and ignorance, and tells him plainly how he may cure it. “Let him ask of GOD, who giveth unto all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and wisdom shall be given him.”

It will be well to consider this gracious promise with an eye to the subject of the services—the Collect, I mean, and the Epistle, appointed by the Church for the present Sunday. They both relate to the use of the holy Scriptures. The Epistle tells us for what purpose the Scriptures were written : viz. for our learning ; that we, through patience and comfort of God's holy Word, might have hope. The Collect is a prayer, that God's gracious purpose in giving the Bible to man may be fulfilled in us : that we may so read and use the divine Book, as to embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life. In other words, it is a prayer for spiritual wisdom : for what is spiritual wisdom, but a true understanding and remembrance of the Bible, in those matters, on which our life eternal depends ?

According to St. James, then, the key to the Bible, the secret for obtaining the knowledge of God's Truth, is Prayer. If any man lack wisdom, if he feel in himself that he does not hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the holy Scriptures as he could wish, “ let him ask that wisdom of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.” You see, the promise is quite express and positive ; as is the like promise of our SAVIOUR ; “ If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly FATHER give the HOLY SPIRIT to them that ask HIM.”

And to encourage us still more in our prayers, we are put in mind that God gives to all ; that HE gives liberally ; that HE does not upbraid, or unkindly remind people of His gifts.

HE gives *to all*. The unthankful and the evil receive from HIM life and breath, and light and air, and food and raiment, and health and friends, and innumerable blessings and comforts of various kinds. How much more may those expect, by His mercy, to grow better, who sincerely long and pray for improvement.

Again, the ALMIGHTY gives *liberally*. He opens His hand, and filleth all things living with plenteousness. It is His delight to be bountiful ; HE loves to be good and gracious ; HE is never tired of showing kindness. When you pray to HIM to do you good, you pray to HIM to do that in which HE greatly delights. Can there be a greater encouragement to those who seriously desire good things of HIM ?

Further, we are put in mind of another circumstance, which,

when it is found in men's earthly benefactors, is always accounted a great addition to their kindness. *God upbraideth not* : that is to say, HE does not, like niggardly men, proudly reproach those to whom HE has been bountiful, but shows them by His whole way of dealing with them that all His intention is to do them good. Consider what an infinite host of favours we are every one of us receiving from the ALMIGHTY, every day and hour of our lives ; and how quietly and silently HE goes on, every succeeding day and hour, heaping up new favours upon us. If HE call on us to thank and praise HIM ; if, for that purpose, HE remind us of past mercies ; it is not for His own sake, but purely for ours ; because thanking and praising HIM is the best comfort we can have here, and the very preparation for happiness hereafter. Thus you see how truly it is said of the Bountiful Giver of all good to all men, that “ HE upbraideth not ; ” and therefore no man has occasion to be shy of asking favours of HIM, as they naturally are shy of asking favours of each other, as expecting, at some future time, to be reminded of them in a mortifying way. The more they ask of HIM, the better HE is pleased, provided only they ask devoutly. Instead of reproaching them with all HE has done for them before, like proud and weak men when their petitioners keep returning, HE encourages them to try again and again : the more we ask the better HE is pleased, provided only we ask with a good mind.

Such is the encouragement Christians have to pray—such the sure way by which spiritual wisdom may be attained by all who will. Nevertheless, it is quite plain that few have such wisdom as I have mentioned ; few have a right practical understanding of the Scriptures. This is plain, were it only from the circumstance, that Christians agree so little among themselves what the Scriptures really mean : they disagree, not only in small circumstances, but in the most important points of Faith and Practice. Now, it is plain that where this happens, they cannot, more than one of them, be right ; and equally plain, that so far as they are wrong, they are wanting in true spiritual wisdom, in the right understanding of the Bible.

Now, how should this be ? that when the very SON OF GOD is come from Heaven to give men understanding, they should still be in blindness and darkness ?

In the first place, many do not pray. The promise of understanding is to prayer; they who ask of God shall receive spiritual wisdom. No wonder if those who neglect to ask, however sharp and knowing they may be in other things, remain as children, without sense or discretion in their judgment of what relates to God's kingdom. It is to be feared that many great scholars have fallen into grievous errors, in spite of all their shrewdness and industry, for this simple reason, that they were not devout, they did not in earnest ask God's blessing on their labours. But do not imagine, that great scholars only are likely to go wrong in that way. Every man has his own soul to save, and has need to be a scholar in the Scriptures, so far as knowing the way to save it. But if he set about this study, either reading or hearing the Gospel, in a proud, conceited, self-sufficient way, then, the quicker he is in natural understanding, and the more diligent he is to learn, and the more leisure he enjoys, the farther he is likely to go wrong in his notions of the meaning of Scripture. For, depending on himself, he will not ask of God; and not asking, he will not obtain. When I say he will not ask, I do not suppose that any person, imagining himself to be a Christian, entirely neglects Prayer to God. But I mean that he will not ask earnestly; he will not pray from his very heart. That is, in God's sight, he will not pray: for God looks on the very heart, and judges by what he finds there.

Now to these persons of whom I have been speaking, who are too self sufficient to pray, according to the true sense of the word prayer, for a right knowledge of the meaning of the Sacred Scriptures—to them add the infinite number of those who do pray, but not in faith; and you will cease to wonder that so little should be found of spiritual wisdom even among Christians. For it is most distinctly to be noted, that the promise made by God's HOLY SPIRIT in the text depends on these two conditions: first, that a man pray; and secondly, that he pray in faith. "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering: for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind, and tossed: For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the LORD: a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." Putting the Apostle's words all together, we may perhaps see plainly enough what the faith is which he requires: it is such a faith as will

keep a man from wavering—keep him from being double-minded, divided, unsteady in his ways. People are wanting in this faith ;—they waver in their prayers for spiritual wisdom ; they are double-minded, divided, unstable,—when they do not really intend, supposing God shows them the truth, to practise it with all their might. They have faith ;—they are single-minded, simple, steady worshippers of God,—when they truly and heartily purpose to perform His will the moment they know it. Balaam, for example, had not faith, when he desired God to let him know whether it was His will for him to go with Balak's messengers or no. He doubted not that God was, nor that he was in God's hand : but he did not devoutly give himself up to God, to do what seemed HIM good : he wavered between his Maker and the wages of unrighteousness. Therefore, much as he knew of God's wonders, he could not be said to have spiritual wisdom. The Jews at Capernaum had not faith, when they asked our LORD to tell them, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" For when they found that God's work was not such as they had hoped ; that it was altogether a spiritual thing, contrary to their schemes of worldly greatness ; they left our SAVIOUR and walked no more with HIM. These examples may serve to show, that the faith which recommends our prayers to God, is when we give ourselves up, in the thought and purpose of our hearts, to obey His gracious will, once made known to us in answer to our prayers.

And perhaps it might be well to bear this in mind, when we are looking at those portions of the Gospel, which promise every thing to faith and prayer. For example, where our SAVIOUR tells His disciples, "What things soever ye desire ; when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." This, it is likely, may have startled many. For who, it may be said, ever received all the blessings he prayed for ? But this is answered by asking again, Who ever, when he prayed, believed that he received what he asked for, in the full meaning of our SAVIOUR's words ? For by such belief, it should seem that He meant such a faith as St. James describes in the text : full trust in HIM, and entire submission to His holy will. Any person so minded, any person thoroughly willing to let God choose for him, would in reality always believe that he receives of God

what he prays for. For he would be more sure of God's love, and disposition to do the very best for him, than of his own love for himself. Suppose, then, he prays for any worldly comfort—for his own health, or life, or for the health or life of a dear friend. It will all the while be strong upon his mind, that God only is able to judge whether this, if granted, would prove such a blessing and comfort as one naturally imagines. Therefore, how earnestly soever a thoroughly Christian devout soul may feel and utter any particular wish, it will always be tempered with this conviction, deeply rooted in his heart, that, however God may appear to deny him, HE will in fact grant the blessing he asks for: and if not in the very form and manner in which he asks for it, yet still the same blessing will come somehow, he is quite sure, in a way which God knows to be better.

Our SAVIOUR's words then, of which we are speaking, may perhaps not improperly be thought to mean as if HE had said, "All things, whatsoever ye desire when ye pray, ye desire, supposing them to be really best for you. Now then make up your minds to this, that God loves you so well, as never to deny you what is really best for you, except by your own fault. Make up your minds to this in earnest, and you will be as sure, when you kneel down, to have the meaning of your prayers granted, as a good child is, when asking a favour of a wise and kind parent. Nay, you will be as much more certain of it, as God is wiser and more kind than the wisest or kindest parent."

Such seems to be the meaning of our SAVIOUR's promise, in regard of all our prayers generally: and St. James's words are the same promise in regard particularly of spiritual wisdom. Of that, as of all other blessings, it is quite certain, by God's word, that whoever comes to ask for it with a heart thoroughly resigned and contented, that is, in other words, with a faithful heart; that man shall receive what he asks.

And here, as it seems to me, is a sufficient answer to those persons who allow themselves to be perplexed by the many disputes among Christians. How, say they, can we know which is right, since there are so many good sort of people on one side and on the other: people who no doubt pray for wisdom, and yet they cannot come to an agreement. Certainly it is sad that so it should be: but no one need be perplexed by it, who considers

how rare a thing it is to find a man thoroughly contented, and willing to resign himself to God in good earnest. And till a person is such, he cannot claim the promise of spiritual wisdom ; and it is no wonder if he go wrong, though he do pray often, and be in many things devout and conscientious. The like may be said of another sorrowful truth, namely, that so many persons are found holding right opinions and using good prayers, yet improving very little, if not going back, in real spiritual wisdom ; that wisdom which teaches men practically to prefer heaven to earth. Their opinions may be right, and their prayers good, but their purposes and thoughts of heart may be very unstable and unsound. They ask, perhaps, every morning, that they may do always what is righteous in God's sight, and every evening, that their hearts may be set to obey His commandments : but, it may be, all the while, they have no serious intention of the kind. What wonder, if when the temptation comes they fall away almost of course, just as if they never prayed at all ?

But, it will be said, who has this intention ? who is so perfect as to pray in that faith, which is quite certain to make prayer heard ? And the answer must be, as in the matter of purity, of charity, and of all Christian graces. No one is perfect in any one of them : but in such measure as you come nearer perfection, so much the more nearly are the promises of CHRIST fulfilled in you. Therefore, to cure the imperfection of your prayers, and learn how to ask for wisdom in faith, is not a thing to be done at once. Try, the very next time you pray. Think of the sin, whatever it be, which most easily prevails against you : and you will find how hard it is really to mean what you say, when you beg of God's HOLY SPIRIT to guard you against that sin. Tempers and desires, long indulged, are like roots that wind deep in the ground ; they will make themselves felt at your very heart, and will render it very difficult indeed to make good resolutions in earnest. Perhaps your good purposes will be the fainter, from remembering that you have often before resolved in like manner to turn from the error of your ways, and all your good meanings have vanished away, when temptation returned upon you. Or you may have gone some way in repentance, yet not feel yourself so easy in mind, so thoroughly possessed of the comforts of a good conscience, as you had expected before-

hand. All these scruples, and many more, occur continually to hinder Christians from holy resolutions, when they pray. But what then? it is for our life: we must have holy resolutions when we pray, or we shall never pray as we ought to do; we shall never obtain that heavenly wisdom, which only can bring us to life everlasting. Although, then, you fall after your prayers,—although your resolutions, too often, prove utterly weak and unstable, yet go on and resolve anew: watch yourself the more earnestly: remember the powerful aid promised, and the infinite loss, if you fail at last.

“For what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

“Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

S E R M O N CXXV.

WAITING FOR THE LORD.

ISAIAH xxv. 9.

“ And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our GOD; we have waited for HIM, and HE will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for HIM, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.”

THIS chapter contains a prophetic description of the feelings of the people of Israel, when they should be delivered from the captivity of Babylon. It is their hymn of thanksgiving, put into their mouths so many years beforehand by the great and holy Prophet. And therefore we may be sure, that whatever emotions of love, gratitude, and devotion, are expressed in it, they are the very feelings which God approves of, which HE would have in the hearts of His people; nay the very feelings which HE puts into their hearts by His HOLY SPIRIT, upon any signal mercy or deliverance.

Now, what is the peculiar feeling expressed in the verse from which the text is taken?

“ It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is the LORD; we have waited for HIM, and HE saveth us: this is the LORD; we have waited for HIM, we are glad and rejoice in His salvation.” “ We have waited for HIM:” that is, we tried to endure our affliction with patience, confidently hoping that a time would come, in which HE would deliver us from it. We tried to be content and let HIM choose for us, because we were quite sure that HE knew

what was for our good much better than we did ourselves. We did not hurry on towards deliverance, without care or consideration, regarding nothing but the evil of the present moment. But repressing and silencing our natural fretfulness, we waited till God should see fit to deliver us : and now we have so much the more comfort in our deliverance ; because, however weakly and imperfectly, we did endeavour to be quiet, and resigned, and thankful in the very midst of our adversity.

The text, thus understood, contains an earnest recommendation from ALMIGHTY GOD to us all, that we should patiently wait for His mercy in all our trials and troubles, great or small. It may do us much good if we turn our thoughts seriously towards this His gracious invitation : considering, First, What great reason we have to close with it without delay. Secondly, What peculiar danger we are in of deceiving ourselves, and going wrong in this respect ; and how we may best guard against that danger.

First, To be patient and resigned in any sorrow or affliction, and let GOD choose for us, is the only way to make sure of relief and deliverance at last. For this is the great subject of GOD's instruction and consolation to His afflicted servants in every page of His Holy Word. " Wait on the LORD—be of good courage, and HE shall strengthen thy heart—wait on the LORD." " I waited patiently for the LORD, and HE inclined unto me, and heard my calling." " My soul waiteth for the LORD, more than they who watch for the morning." So the holy Psalmist, in a few places out of many ; and the Prophet Isaiah teaches the same lesson. For thus he expresses the temper of a faithful Israelite, when the cloud is over him, and the light of GOD's presence hid for a time : " I will wait upon the Lord, which hideth His face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for HIM." And he has left for our consolation this full and gracious promise, summing up the whole matter in a very few words : " The LORD waits, that HE may be gracious unto you : for the LORD is a God of Judgment : blessed are all they that wait for HIM."

Turn now to the New Testament, and you find this very temper of quiet resignation, under the name of faith, recommended every where as the one thing needful to entitle us to a share in GOD's merciful promise of pardon and salvation through JESUS CHRIST. We may take the whole doctrine from the sacred

Epistle of the Hebrews. "The just shall live by faith." And if you would know what faith is, it presently goes on to teach us: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen:" that is, it is fixing our hearts in such a manner upon the unseen blessings of another world, upon the presence of an unseen God, the prayer of an unseen MEDIATOR, and the support of an unseen SPIRIT, that for their sake we shall be content and pleased with every thing in this world, except our sins,—shall be willing to venture all our chance of happiness and comfort, both here and hereafter, upon the mercy of God in the death of JESUS CHRIST.

We must take care not to imagine that we fulfil the conditions of the New Covenant, and have true faith in JESUS CHRIST, if we merely believe that CHRIST died for us, and look up to HIM to be saved at last. The faith which is to justify and save us must run through our whole conduct,—must cause us, both in good and bad times, to give ourselves heartily up to God, desiring always to have HIM choose for us, and making up our minds, if need were, rather to die than offend our SAVIOUR. This is "waiting for God" like a Christian; and whatever may be said of present relief and comfort, certain it is, that in no other way but this can you ever hope for pardon and salvation at the last day.

But there is another thought, which surely would prevail on us to be patient and quiet in affliction, if we would in earnest attend to it: and that is, the remembrance of our past sins. He who seriously believes, and deeply recollects, that it is nothing but the free mercy of God which gives him any chance at all of pardon, cannot surely grumble or complain, as if he had a right to choose his own condition. He perceives, from the bottom of his heart, how unworthy he is of the least of God's mercies: and his worst troubles are so far a comfort to him, that they give him a comfortable hope of his not being cast off by his heavenly FATHER; "for whom the LORD loveth, HE chasteneth; and scourgeth every son whom HE receiveth." HE considers that every feeling of bodily pain, every loss of outward comfort, is a testimony to his soul, that God is yet dealing with him as a father: that HE has not yet cast him entirely away from His presence, nor finally taken His HOLY SPIRIT from him. So the

Apostle teaches every sick person ; “ If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons ; for what son is he whom the FATHER chasteneth not ? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.” He, therefore, whose conscience troubles him with any sin, cannot do better than resign himself patiently to the shame and pain of that remorse, or of any other punishment which God sends upon him : thankfully acknowledging that it is all the work of perfect justice and mercy, and fearing nothing so deeply, as lest God should withdraw His hand, and leave him to go back to his old sins : and therefore beseeching HIM continually, rather to make the remembrance of his sins more grievous to him than it is.

If we still want something to reconcile us to trouble and affliction, let us pass on from the thought of our own unworthiness, and from the thought of God’s relief, promised sooner or later to patient resignation ; from these thoughts let us pass on to the remembrance of what our blessed LORD and SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST endured so calmly and meekly for our sakes. HE who had no sin, no unworthiness, to make HIM bear His affliction quietly : HE who could have delivered HIMSELF, with a word spoken, from all His calamities at once and for ever : HE chose rather, out of mere love and pity to wicked men, His betrayers and murderers, to go on suffering to the end, to wait God’s time for His deliverance, and say, from His heart, what we too often repeat with our lips only, “ Not MY will, but THINE be done.” And has JESUS CHRIST borne so much for us, and shall we not be content and thankful to bear, for His sake, some short affliction for our eternal good ? Did the Just die on the Cross for the unjust and sinner, and will he refuse to bear, it may be, a few hours’ pain or languor for the love of so merciful a SAVIOUR ?

Such are the great and unspeakable reasons why Christian people, lying under God’s afflicting hand, should quietly wait for HIM, that is, make up their minds to be afflicted as long as it pleases HIM, and yet to wear a cheerful countenance to the very best of their power, and keep on trying to be thankful, as they may, for the sorrow and pain which they cannot help feeling.

But I observed, that there are some peculiar dangers we are in of deceiving ourselves, and going wrong in respect of this

great virtue of resignation. And this I must now endeavour to explain.

Many persons are apt to imagine, when they hear talk of resignation and quiet endurance, that such instructions concern those only who are in any great trouble or sorrow; that we must wait till God send some great sickness upon us, or visit us with the loss of a dear friend, or of all our worldly substance, before we can learn to practise these duties.

Such persons do not rightly consider the true condition of human life, which must be a yoke and a burden, in every case, even where people seem to be most highly favoured, as far as the goods of this world are concerned. Ask those who are most prosperous among us, and seem most entirely to have their own way, if they have not some secret thorn in their sides, which keeps embittering their best estate, and hinders them from being so easy and happy as any slight observer would suppose they must be. Now here is their trial in respect of patience and resignation: namely, in their way of governing their thoughts and feelings with regard to this imperfection in their lot—this “*sore place*,” as one may call it, whether known or unknown to their neighbours.

I take it for granted that every one has a struggle of this kind to go through, because, even if we are not conscious of it ourselves, there is in our most flattering enjoyments, at all times of life, a sense of imperfection, which keeps urging us on to seek something further. Perfect ease, peace, and contentment, cannot be had in this world. Now, if people will not make up their minds to this, if they will not wait God’s time, and God’s way, of making them happy and comfortable, then they will first of all fall into repining and discontent, will be uneasy, and fret against their MAKER, as if it was in their power to get away from under His yoke. And since they cannot do this, cannot shake off the burthen of the LORD, they will in the next place be tempted to hide their eyes from it, and do what they can to forget it. And what have they to turn to, when they turn away from God?—what have they to turn towards, but only things trifling or wrong?

It is much, if in long indulgence of restless and discontented thoughts, we have not been tempted to set our minds upon things positively forbidden and wicked; to covet our neighbour’s goods,

and indulge imaginations of evil things. But even if, by God's infinite mercy, you have been restrained from such deeper spots of iniquity, yet even mere diversion and amusement becomes sin, when it is followed for the sake of keeping out serious thought. For what in good earnest can be said for a man, who, if he were asked fairly to say, why he is so fond of this or that amusement, this or that study, could only answer, "It is to avoid thinking of the God who is watching me, and the Judgment-seat of CHRIST, before which I am soon to stand." Such a temper is self-condemned at once, and will not bear excusing for a moment.

It is just the same with regard to those who lose themselves, not in pleasure and amusement, but in the business and bustle of the world. They encourage themselves with the thought, that they are doing good to their neighbours; that they are public-spirited persons, great benefactors to the world. And so very often they are; and it is the more melancholy to see them neglecting and forgetting that other world, which, after all their labour, their skill and anxiety, must be all in all both to us and to them. For we must not deceive ourselves in an affair of so great consequence. If we do kindly by our neighbour, because it is natural and pleasant to us to do so, or because we like to be well thought and well spoken of, or because we rejoice to find and feel our own power and skill, and to be of consequence in our neighbourhood, we may have the reward we desire, and more, in this present world; but we must not dream of being any the happier, in the next world, for such virtue and charity as this. What we do for the love and fear of God, that God graciously rewards in Heaven, for the sake of JESUS CHRIST. But what we do to be praised and respected by man, can never be any comfort to us in another world.

Upon the whole, it appears that all persons, whether they are under any great affliction or no, have need to practise the virtue recommended in the text—the most comfortable virtue of resignation and patient waiting for God. If they are in joy and high spirits, they must learn to moderate and command themselves: they must practise the fear of God, and the continual remembrance of His presence; and this is so far a sacrifice, that it requires constant pains and self-denial, at a time when our corrupt nature finds it most difficult to practise such lessons. If they are

in a quiet, regular course of worldly amusement and worldly business, then they have need of continual efforts to lift their hearts upwards, and live above this present world, even while they are living in it. And so in every other case that can be supposed : the whole world is a school of resignation ; and if we could once, by the blessing of God, learn that one truth in perfection, we should have come as near as fallen creatures can come in this world to the temper of Heaven itself.

But the more excellent and heavenly it is to be thus patiently minded, the more careful should we be not to mistake our own condition, or to imagine that we have arrived at true Christian resignation, when perhaps we are idling away our time and thoughts in mere sloth and carelessness. There seem to be persons in the world who take whatever happens easily enough for a long time together, just because they are not used to give themselves any trouble about any thing. They have their own round of accustomed enjoyments, and as long as they are not disturbed in that, come what will, it makes very little difference. Such persons may perhaps be very unconcerned at real and great calamities ; at the loss of a near relation, for instance ; but their unconcern has nothing in the world to do with Christian resignation. It is mere selfish indolence, and no better.

Others get over the ills and anxieties of life, as it seems to themselves, and not seldom to others, tolerably enough, by the help of a bustling, hurrying kind of cheerfulness, which, where it is not put on to conceal some secret disquiet, has surely much more to do with a man's bodily health, with the state of his blood and spirits, than with the love and fear of God, and the hope of a world to come. They say, they "let nothing daunt them," not even the presence of an offended God, nor the daily approach of death, while their sins are yet unrepented of. This may be high spirit and fortitude in the eye of the world, but in the eye of God, and of all who will take God's word, it is no better than desperate and wilful blindness. If we will not acknowledge it now, we shall, we must acknowledge it when we come to die, That no sorrow, no disquiet, I had almost said no despair, is so sad a condition for a sinful man, as the mirth and ease of one who enjoys himself merely because he has got rid of the remembrance of God.

This conclusion, I say, we must all come to sooner or later ; either in repentance or in death. We must, one day or another, every one of us, turn our eyes inwards, and acknowledge that we ourselves, no less than every other soul to which CHRIST and His Gospel have been made known, are called on to resign and deny our own selves ; to give up every notion of choosing or making our own happiness ; and to wait patiently for comfort and salvation, till God see fit to bestow it upon us.

This sounds like too hard a lesson ; and so indeed it would be, if we only considered our own frailty, and did not remember the supporting grace of the HOLY SPIRIT, so bountifully promised in Holy Scripture to every one who will but ask for it in earnest in the name of JESUS CHRIST. Pray earnestly for this grace : beseech God, night and day, to make you patient and resigned ; quiet and temperate in prosperity, contented and thankful in adversity. Endeavour, with all your hearts, to mean what you say, when in repeating the Lord's Prayer you come to the words, "THY Will be done in earth as it is in Heaven."

And that we may pray for resignation as we ought to do, let us endeavour to think on it as much as we can at other times, and to disengage our thoughts from the world. Let us use ourselves to recollect, in the midst of our pleasure and our business, how soon all these things will pass away for ever ; how soon we shall be left alone with our God and our conscience, in a world of which we only know that it is to last for ever and ever. By forcing ourselves, as it were, every now and then, to think earnestly upon these things, we shall gradually unfasten the ties which bind us to this lower world ; and shall learn to wait, more and more patiently, for the God of all patience and consolation.

Finally, let us refresh ourselves from time to time by looking to the great and good examples of holy men, living and dead. We have most likely known some, we have certainly heard and read of many, who have found comfort and salvation in waiting patiently for the LORD. At any rate, we have heard and read of ONE, Whose whole life, from His cradle to His grave, was one act of Divine resignation. We have read, and heard, and from the bottom of our hearts we are bound to acknowledge, that even CHRIST pleased not Himself. To His pure and heavenly mind how irksome must have been the years HE spent on earth ;

beholding as HE did, and understanding to the full the wickedness of those among whom HE lived ; and yet HE did not hurry away from us, but waited, calm and resigned, for the time appointed of His FATHER.

“Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the LORD. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient ; stablish your hearts ; for the coming of the LORD draweth nigh.”

SERMON CXXVI.

FINAL MEETING OF PASTORS AND PEOPLE.

COLOSSIANS i. 28.

“Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in CHRIST JESUS.”

THIS being the Sunday next before Christmas Day, is one of the four Sundays which the Church of CHRIST has appointed for the solemn office of ordaining Priests and Deacons, to minister the Word and Sacraments of JESUS CHRIST under the Bishops, the successors of His Apostles. In that office, no doubt, many congregations were engaged to day. The persons to be ordained priests took their solemn oaths before God's altar, to forsake, as much as in them lies, all worldly cares and studies, and to devote themselves entirely to the serving God in His Church, and saving the souls committed to their charge. They swore to be diligent, orderly, persevering, in every kind of pastoral duty; and especially to set a good example in all things. Then, after earnest prayer, the Bishop's hands were laid upon them, and they received authority from the HOLY GHOST for the work of a Priest in the Church of God. Which awful covenant between God and them they presently sealed by the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of CHRIST; and so went out of the holy place, where the Bishop's hands were laid on them, commissioned messengers

of our LORD and SAVIOUR, fellow-workers with HIM in the divine office of bringing lost souls to GOD, and feeding the redeemed with the true Bread from Heaven.

Now though we may very few of us have ever been witnesses of this sacred ceremony of ordination, yet we are deeply concerned in it. For the Church of CHRIST is one body, of which the ministers and pastors are principal members; and if they any how fail of God's blessing, either through their own unworthiness, or any thing wrong about their appointment, it is not only their own loss, or the loss of the particular congregation in which they minister, but the whole Church is the worse for it: according to what St. Paul tells us, "If one member of the Body," and much more so principal a member, "suffer, all the members suffer with it: and if one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it." Therefore, the Church of GOD in her public services very much impresses on us the duty of remembering the clergy every where, offering for them the sacrifice of prayer and intercession, always in our morning and evening devotions, and very particularly, as often as we draw near the Holy Table where we communicate with CHRIST. For then and there we mention before GOD especially, all whom HE has chosen to be Bishops and curates, beseeching HIM to give them His grace, that they may both by their life and doctrine set forth His true and lively Word, and rightly and duly administer His holy Sacraments. And four times in a year we add to our devotions a prayer, that GOD would at those times "so guide and govern the minds of the Bishops and pastors of His flock, that they may lay hands suddenly on no man, but faithfully and wisely make choice of fit persons to serve in the sacred ministry of His Church."

This, as I said before, is one of those times of ordination. We are then fulfilling the instructions of the Church, if we call on you at this time especially, to remember in your prayers those whom the HOLY GHOST has set over you, to be Bishops and Priests among His people, and to beg a blessing on those His servants, who in any part of His Church, however distant, have this morning been called to that most sacred office.

Another hint we may take from St. Paul's expression in the text; the purpose of his ministry was, to "present every man perfect in CHRIST JESUS." We shall do well to think of the

Pastors' office as intended to prepare us for the great and terrible Day. Consider the thing in this manner. In all other human pursuits and employments, you may judge, after no long time, whether a person has been successful or no. Wait till next harvest only, and you will know whether the husbandman's trouble, which he now takes in tilling the ground, will or will not bear good fruit. A few months, or at most a few years, will show the tradesman what profit or loss his trade is likely to bring. The physician in like manner will speedily find out what effect his medicines take on the patient : and so of most other occupations. Only the pastor and guide of souls must wait till another world opens on him, before either himself or others can judge positively of the fruit of his labours. There is in the counsels of ALMIGHTY GOD an hour fixed, unknown to us, in which it will be openly revealed to the world, what souls are saved and lost, and what share the conduct of each of God's ministers has had in saving or losing them. Up to that hour, we may indeed praise or blame, but we can hardly be sure that we praise or blame rightly. But that hour will settle all.

It seems to me that this consideration, if one turn one's mind steadily to it, has something in it very serious and awful. Here is a set of persons appointed by our LORD Himself, whose proper business and employment it is to prepare men's souls for His coming in person to examine them. As often as you see one of them, you see a living, speaking witness of God's message by JESUS CHRIST, and CHRIST's message by His Apostles, concerning the judgment of the quick and dead. The sight of a clergyman should remind you of eternal things, and bring them home to your mind, as things which will one day be here ; as naturally as the sight of a soldier reminds you of war, or the sight of a man sowing corn, of harvest. And this, I say, however lightly some may treat it, is in very truth an awful and serious thought. And if it be scorned or neglected now, yet it will not depart for ever. It will be a bitter remembrance awaking in your mind, when the hour shall come for all wasted talents to be accounted for.

Now, if Christian people would use themselves to look at God's clergy in this light, namely, as persons sent to prepare themselves and their brethren for the day of judgment, they

would judge far more truly and wisely than they now commonly judge of the office of the clergy, and of most things relating to the Church.

Is it not the case, that very many look upon Bishops and other ministers as a set of men whose principal duty it is to instruct and train up the people, and teach them knowledge, whereby they may be saved? Are we not all apt to regard them as just a higher sort of schoolmasters, very useful indeed, and very necessary, to teach people, old and young, their duty; but not much wanted where that duty is known, and men are tolerably well inclined to do it? Surely there can be no doubt that most of us regard instruction as the chief work of the Christian ministry, since almost every one agrees to think more of preaching than of any thing else done in the Church. But what says Holy Scripture? We are ministers and stewards of the Mysteries of God, that is, chiefly of the holy Sacraments. We are to baptize all men in the Name of the FATHER, the SON, and the HOLY GHOST, and so to convey to them the new birth, which makes them partakers of the Kingdom of Heaven. We are to feed them from time to time with the Body and Blood of CHRIST, the atoning Sacrifice, verily and indeed conveyed to the faithful by the consecrated bread and wine; consecrated, I say, by their hands, and their prayers, who have CHRIST's warrant for doing that holy work. These two most holy Sacraments are the means appointed by our LORD Himself, whereby His people may be in communion with HIM. Catechizing, teaching, preaching, even prayer itself, are but as means to that blessed end: necessary labours, to prepare beings, fallen and frail as we are, to be one with CHRIST, and have CHRIST one with them. Therefore catechizing, teaching, preaching, however good and noble employments, are not so good, so high, so noble, as the administration of the holy Sacraments. and hence it is plain what an error the generality of mankind are now in, who think all depends upon sermons, and care for nothing in comparison with preaching.

And what is the consequence? Most hurtful in many ways, but in one especially, which I will now mention; namely, that men's minds are withdrawn from things eternal, and turned towards things temporal, even in their religion itself; that is, in their thoughts and reasonings about it. For teaching and preaching,

as we all know, may bear open and visible fruit, which men may judge of in this present world. People feel themselves for the time edified; they remember what they heard, and amend their ways; and they see their neighbours doing the same. Such are, we will hope not seldom, certainly sometimes, more or less, the actual results of preaching and teaching the Word. But the fruit and effect of the Holy Sacraments is altogether inward and spiritual. It is quite entirely matter of faith; the eyes, and ears, and feelings of man can take no note of it. How should they, when it is, in fact, Union and Communion with God through the Man CHRIST JESUS? a blessing so high and heavenly, that the very Angels desire to look into it; that is, they do not yet quite understand it. And the purpose of this blessed Union is, that we being found at the last day one with CHRIST and CHRIST with us, HE may graciously bestow on us the full benefit of His Sacrifice; may present us to His FATHER as it were parts of HIMSELF, transformed into His likeness and image by the continual indwelling of His HOLY SPIRIT. Such is the fruit of Sacraments worthily received, which cannot be known nor understood till the last day comes: but the fruit of preaching, as I just now said, strikes every observer in this world; and, therefore, to value preaching more than Sacraments, what is it but to judge by sight rather than by faith? to think more of this world than of the next? Not to mention what too often happens, that where there is much talk about preaching and the like, and of the seeming improvement which follows, not a few are encouraged in the profane thought, now, alas, too fashionable, that the Church is neither more nor less than a way of making people good and decent here in this present world, and the clergy no higher than an useful institution of the state for the teaching men religion and morality; but that such as will be religious and moral of themselves may do very well, and be saved at last, without either Church, Sacraments, or Clergy.

In order to stop this profaneness (which is commoner I fear than most people think), I do not see what can be done so useful, as putting men continually in mind, what is the true, proper, and peculiar object of all these holy and divine institutions, the Ministry of CHRIST, His Sacraments, and His Church. The proper object and purpose of them all is, not simply to make people good, but

to render them fit for Heaven by constant communion with JESUS CHRIST. Whatever methods the Church uses, this is the end she has in view. Whether it be by teaching indirectly, or more closely and directly by the Holy Sacraments; by both ways and by all ways her study is, not to make you quiet and respectable in this world, but to prepare you for the enjoyment of God in the world to come. The Word of God, therefore, and His Sacraments, are treasures with which CHRIST's Ministers are trusted, as stewards are trusted with an absent Master's property, to be made the most of against His assured return: assured to be some time, but most uncertain of all things when. Again, in another sense, they are trusted with the souls of CHRIST's people, just as stewards or upper servants are trusted with the under servants, to give them their portion of meat in due season. The great MASTER of the House says HIMSELF, "Blessed is that servant whom his LORD, when HE cometh, shall find so doing."

Now let us endeavour, for a few moments, to fix our thoughts on the picture presented to us by these words of our blessed SAVIOUR; the same, in fact, as was in St. Paul's mind when he wrote as in the text to his Colossians: what does he say was his business among them? He was continually preaching CHRIST, "warning every man, and teaching every man in all skill," or "wisdom." To what purpose, does he say? That quarrels may be allayed, discreditable practices stopped, and the neighbourhood improve in decency, quietness, and industry? No; it was something far higher which he sought. He wanted to "present every man perfect in CHRIST JESUS." He wanted, if so it might be, not to miss one single soul of all those whom he had instructed and brought to the faith by his ministry half the world over; he wanted to see every one of them on the JUDGE's right hand at the last Day, and to present every one perfect in CHRIST JESUS; that is, every one a full grown Christian, habitually conformed to the likeness of the LORD and SAVIOUR, and trained up in constant communion with HIM through the Sacraments of the Church.

Again, I say, endeavour to represent to yourself the kind of picture (if I may so call it) which was then in the great Apostle's mind; people and pastors assembled together before the throne

of JESUS CHRIST. For example, represent to your mind the great Apostle St. Paul himself, raised from the dead, and there meeting, and knowing again, face to face, those to whom he preached the Gospel. Think of that meeting as of an event, I do not say which may happen, but which we are quite sure will one day happen: for the Apostle expressly foretels it. "We must," says he, "personally present every one of you before GOD: be it your care, as it ought to be ours, that we may be able to present every one perfect. We must give account for your souls, one and all: we beseech you, submit yourselves to our teaching, that we may do it with joy and not with grief." St. Paul, therefore, and all his hearers, will look one another in the face that day; but with what various recollections and feelings! Some, like Timothy and St. Luke, faithful and affectionate followers of the Apostle, even as he followed Christ: full of unfeigned faith and good works; persevering as they had begun, and keeping to the end that good thing which was committed to them by the HOLY GHOST, when they were made Disciples of our LORD. See the fervent and affectionate way in which St. Paul always speaks of such persons, and imagine, if you can, the overflowing joy of meeting them, pardoned and saved for certain, in the visible presence of their common MASTER and SAVIOUR. On the other side will be some like Demas, who continued with St. Paul for a time, but when persecution drew very near, forsook him, for love of this present world: others, like Felix, who were touched with fear when they heard him reasoning of a judgment to come, but threw away the grace given them, pretending to wait for a more convenient season; and thousands, alas, will be there seen, who, like the stubborn unbelieving Jews, would not even hear his word, would not even stop to ask a question, but cried out at once, "Away with him!" But there will be no stopping of ears then, nor any more flattering of themselves that they may yet find a convenient season, another chance to escape ruin. Surely one of the terrors of the Day of wrath will be the confusion and shame which will then overwhelm such as have been unprofitable hearers, on meeting those whose pastoral warnings they had disdained.

But, it may be said, all those things are written of St. Paul, of him who was called by CHRIST's voice from Heaven to be one of

the chiefest of the Apostles : does it follow that every ordinary Bishop or Priest has a right to apply these things to himself ? and need his hearers think so seriously, as St. Paul's hearers might well think, of meeting him before the throne of God ?”

To which it may be said, first of all, that every one of us is literally a disciple of St. Paul, since we may hear and read his holy writings, though we have him not in person among us. And so far we are just in the same danger as Felix was, or Demas, or the Jews. Whatever we may think of inferior pastors, St. Paul at least, and the other holy writers of the Bible, will most assuredly be confronted with every one of us in that day, and it concerns us most deeply to take care in time, that they rise not up in judgment to condemn us.

Secondly : what if our living teachers be (as no doubt they are) not worthy to be named with St. Paul ? yet the Church and the Sacraments are the same now as then : and by means of them, the most unprovided of us all may be taught and warned in all saving wisdom, would he but seriously look after it.

I beseech you, then, let us not flatter ourselves that we can escape confusion in the last day, by throwing the blame on those with whom God has entrusted us. They indeed are most fearfully answerable ; but yet we are also trusted, every one with his own soul. Be our teacher what he may, we who have the Word and Sacraments of CHRIST among us shall be held inexcusable in that day if we have not *root in ourselves*. Not even the merits of the All-sufficient SAVIOUR will then do us any good, if, under pretence of His ministers' unworthiness, we refuse to acquaint ourselves with HIM now.

SERMON CXXVII.

THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST'S BIRTH, AND OF OUR NEW BIRTH.

(PREACHED ON CHRISTMAS-DAY.)

ISAIAH lv. 8, 9.

“ My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are My ways your ways, saith the LORD: For as the Heavens are higher than the Earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

WHEN a person wakes on a Christmas morning, and turns his mind at once, as a thoughtful person naturally will, to the great and unutterable Miracle of the day, it is somewhat of the same kind of thought as when we gaze earnestly on the deep heaven above us; and the longer we gaze, the more certainly we feel how far it reaches, how utterly and entirely beyond us; how we might go on for ever, and be more and more lost and swallowed up in the contemplation of it.

It should seem that the blue sky or firmament was on purpose so made, the light caused so to pass through it, and our eyes so formed, that as we look on it, or but think of it, spread above us, we may feel that we are in the midst of a Power and Wisdom which we can by no means understand; which is at the same time close to us, and yet infinitely far above us. The Scripture encourages this thought in many places. Thus God is called, first in Job, and many times afterwards in the Prophets, “ HE who stretcheth out the Heavens alone, by Himself; Who spreadeth out the Heavens like a curtain; Who sitteth upon the circle of

the earth, and the inhabitants of the earth are as grasshoppers ; Who stretcheth out the Heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in." " The inhabitants of the earth are as grasshoppers : " surely that word speaks to every man's heart, expressing how little, and mean, and insignificant, we feel, when we look up to the unbounded sky, and think of ourselves, how little room we seem to take in God's vast and wonderful world.

This is an overpowering thought ; but the Scripture tells us something else, which makes it a thought full of all consolation. The height of Heaven represents to our very eyes, not only God's incomprehensible greatness and wisdom, but His infinite love also. For " look how high the Heaven is in comparison of the earth, so great is His Mercy also turned toward them that fear HIM : look how wide also the east is from the west, so far hath HE set our sins from us." The space in which our eyesight loses itself, when we look up on a clear day, or when we look all around from a high place on some boundless prospect, is an appointed measure of God's love,—a token from Himself of His pardoning and life-giving favour, shown to us as members of His SON. The Psalms repeat this over and over : " Thy mercy, O LORD, is in the Heavens, and Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds." As if it were God's purpose, that in that portion of the Scriptures, which the rules of His Church should make most familiar to all, that is, in the Psalms, Christian children should learn from the beginning the right use of the things which they see around them, and should never want something to remind them of saving truth, since even so common a thing as the sky, which they cannot help seeing with their eyes, is made to them a kind of sacramental token of Infinite Power, Wisdom, and Love.

As in many other places of the Prophet Isaiah, so here in the text, the ALMIGHTY commends to us this thought, That we should learn, from the very sight of the Heaven above us, not to lose in our sense of God's mercy, the deep trembling awe and reverence, with which we ought to regard all His doings ; not to dream that we understand them ; nor to conclude that they fail, because we do not yet see the fruit of them ; but to labour diligently in the ways of our duty, and for the rest to be silent before HIM, and wait on HIM with adoring patience. " My thoughts are

not your thoughts, neither are My ways your ways, saith the LORD: For as the Heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."

Now this same lesson, which the very height of the Heavens was intended to teach all mankind, seems to be brought before us Christians in a wonderful, unspeakable way, when we are called on to remember our LORD's Nativity. For what, in fact, was that Birth which took place to-day at Bethlehem, eighteen hundred and forty one years ago, and in remembrance of which the whole Church has ever since kept this day holy? It is something so high and sacred that it seems almost presumption to speak of it: we have need first to pray, that we may be forgiven for speaking unworthily: however, let us speak of it, as we may, in the words of the Church. We believe that, as on this day, the only-begotten SON of GOD, begotten of His FATHER before all worlds, having been conceived by the HOLY GHOST and made Man, was born at Bethlehem of the Blessed Virgin Mary: that on this day GOD was manifested to men and angels in the Flesh, so declaring and making known the Eternal FATHER, in Whose Bosom HE is, and Whom no man hath seen at any time. We believe that HE who was from the beginning, begotten from everlasting of the FATHER, condescended early this morning to have a beginning and birth of His own: that HE who is GOD of GOD vouchsafed to be Man born of a woman: that HE who is called Light of Light prepared HIMSELF, as it were, a visible tabernacle, an undefiled human soul and body, wherein to dwell visibly for ever and ever: that the infant who was born in the stable and laid in the manger is Very GOD of Very GOD, True SON of the Most High GOD, and HIMSELF Truly GOD as His FATHER is: that although in His human soul and body HE is made and created as the first Adam was by His own Almighty Power, yet is HE, as the SON of GOD, begotten not made: HE was seen lying in the manger this morning, just born, weak and helpless as another infant might be; yet HE was even then, and had been for ever and ever, in Heaven with the ALMIGHTY FATHER;—HE, that helpless babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, as any child born yesterday, was the LORD and CREATOR of Heaven and Earth, of those who wor-

shipped HIM and of those who persecuted HIM, of His Mother who had just borne HIM, and of the Angels who were at hand to sing glory to HIM. By HIM all things were made, that are in Heaven and that are in earth,—“whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers, all things were created by HIM and for HIM; and HE is before all things, and by HIM all things consist.” This Great and Eternal God, pitying His creatures in their darkness and misery, and accomplishing His own eternal purpose from the beginning, descended and was incarnate, so many months ago, when the Blessed Virgin was visited by the Angel Gabriel, and the HOLY GHOST came upon her, and the power of the Highest overshadowed her. For us men and for our salvation HE came down from Heaven, and was incarnate by the HOLY GHOST of the Virgin Mary, and was made Man. And now, at the end of nine months, HE made Himself visible to the world which HE had created.

HE began to show HIMSELF to Angels, as well as to men, as St. Paul tells us in several places: that “to the principalities and powers in heavenly places was known by the Church the manifold wisdom of GOD;” and that “these things the Angels desire to look into.” And accordingly the Angels came, as all Christian children know, to sing their Christmas Hymn in the hearing of the shepherds.

This very thing by itself, GOD Incarnate, was the wonder of all wonders,—a matter surely as much above the thoughts and conjectures of man, as the Heaven is higher than the earth: that the CREATOR should become a creature; that the LORD, most holy and true, should join HIMSELF to a sinful race, and become one of them, to deliver them from the evil consequences of their sin.

But even suppose the thought of GOD’s becoming Man had entered into any man’s heart, the circumstances of His coming into the world were far unlike what we should have imagined. We should have expected some such appearance as the Psalms and Prophets sometimes speak of,—in the clouds of Heaven, in terrible majesty: that HE should bow the Heavens, and come down; that HE should touch the mountains, and they should smoke; or at least that HE should enter into His Temple in glory, as the Ark of His Covenant had done of old. It would

never have come into any of our minds to think of any thing so quiet, so poor, mean, and ordinary in outward appearance, as the nativity of the Child JESUS at Bethlehem.

Consider, first, the quietness of this great event : how in the silence of the night, in a town of no great size nor wealth, in an outhouse of an inn, the Great GOD came visibly among His creatures ; as it had been prophesied concerning HIM : the Dew of His Birth was of the womb of the morning : as His Eternal Birth was in the secret and silence of GOD's nature, unspeakably everlasting, beyond all thought of the highest Angel, so His mysterious Birth at Bethlehem was a wonder in silence, and out of sight : none knew it, as far as we are told, but His Virgin Mother and the holy Joseph : every thing, it would seem, was ordered so as to make it most suitable for the GOD of Israel that hideth HIMSELF.

Again, how poor and lowly was every thing around HIM, who was come down to bring us all the treasures of Heaven ! His mother, the betrothed wife of a poor tradesman, who had not, as it seems, wherewith to find her a lodging ; the place, a stable (in which, according to ancient report, an ox and an ass were at that very time feeding) ; His cradle, a manger ; His dress, such swaddling clothes as the children of the poor were commonly wrapt up in. The first persons who came to see HIM, plain simple shepherds, of no account among men, either for their knowledge of the Scriptures, or for their place and station, and qualifications in other respects. And if they said high things concerning HIM, having heard them from the Angel, yet all was kept quiet, His Mother pondering them in her heart, but nothing coming of it all for many years. What talk there was of the wonder in that immediate neighbourhood very soon seems to have died away ; and partly perhaps on this very account, the Angel bade Joseph return to Nazareth, that our LORD might grow up in quiet and obscurity, at a distance from those who might have heard of the wonders of His birth.

The whole history, from beginning to end, is such as no one ever could have imagined : suited to His ways and thoughts, Who is far above out of our sight ; but far unlike the ways and thoughts of mankind.

Imagine only what we should any of us have thought, had we

been present in the place at that time. We should have had, each of us, no doubt, his own fancies and imaginations, not one agreeing with another: many would have hardly thought at all about it: some would just have pitied the Mother and Babe, suffering what to them would appear such pain and inconvenience, and there would have been an end; they would forget it in a few hours. Some few, perhaps, who knew more of the circumstances before, and were more considerate than others, might say to themselves, What manner of child shall this be? but none without especial revelation, such as the Blessed Mary had herself, could have lifted up his thoughts to the real truth—that this is the Eternal SON, the WORD of the FATHER, made a little lower than the Angels for the suffering of death, the Desire of all nations, the second Adam, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the SAVIOUR of the world.

Never, I suppose, since the world began, was there such a moment as that, to show how unlike GOD's thoughts are to our thoughts, and GOD's ways to our ways; except, it may be, that more awful, perhaps more surprising moment, in which the Holy SAVIOUR, the GOD of Heaven and Earth, bowed His head on the Cross and gave up the ghost, being in the place of a malefactor between two thieves. It is in vain trying to think worthily of it. But such thoughts as the following, we may humbly hope, are some of those which the ALMIGHTY meant should be in our minds when we remember it:

We may learn not to doubt that GOD's purposes, however to us unlikely, will be one way or another accomplished. HE had declared, by His holy Prophets, that at that time HE would redeem the world, and that the redemption should begin from Bethlehem: and we see how HE fulfilled it, in a way which no person present would ever for a moment have suspected. So HE has declared that His Church shall last for ever, and shall finally prevail against all the kingdoms of the world; and that all shall work together for good to them that love GOD, and for the punishment of His enemies. This work is even now going on, and we are standing by, witnesses of it, though not knowing how: nay, we are every one of us working in it, either with or against HIM. At present we cannot at all see how it will turn out; many things appear to us going on the contrary way

to what they ought, to bring about the great purpose : many more, of which we cannot see how they should, in any respect, advance it. But let us only wait awhile, and we shall see how, by the most improbable means, HE shall work out the counsel of His will.

And not only in the great concerns of the world and of the kingdom of God, but also in what relates to each of us particularly, we are to be quite sure that the ALMIGHTY has His own purpose concerning us, and that HE is working around us and within us, even in the most ordinary things. We think it a very small matter, whether we perform such and such a task in its time, whether we resist or give way for once to such and such a common temptation ; and all the while, who knows but in God's knowledge and purpose this small matter may be the beginning of great things, to us or to some other, through all eternity ?

Recollect how it is in that, which the Scriptures and the Prayer-book teach us to consider as having something more particularly to do with our LORD's birth : recollect our own baptism. The Collect for Christmas-day teaches that our LORD's taking our nature upon HIM, and His birth on this day of a pure virgin, answers, in some remarkable way, to our being regenerate, and made His children by adoption and grace, that is, to our baptism : for then, as the Baptism Service teaches, we are regenerate and born anew of water and of the HOLY GHOST ; and then, as the Catechism teaches, we are made children of God. As CHRIST at his Nativity showed HIMSELF in our human nature, so we at our new birth, St. Peter tells us, are made partakers of His Divine nature. As HE then became a child of Adam, so we now are made children of God. So great is the change wrought in Holy Baptism : yet who that stood by, and judged by sight, not faith, would imagine there was any change at all ? Who would lift up his heart to believe that a little water, and a few words spoken by CHRIST's Minister, would make so much difference in a little child, were it not that the Scripture of God, interpreted by His Church, so distinctly teaches it ? In this point then, also, we clearly see that our new birth answers to our LORD's nativity ; that is, in the manner of its being so very far unlike what any one would expect. Why should we doubt that so great an end as

salvation may come of so small an outward beginning as the sprinkling of the holy baptismal water in the Three Holy Names ? we who know that our own redemption, and that of the whole world, depended on a child in swaddling clothes, born in an inn stable and laid in a manger ? Surely, among the plain lessons which our LORD's Nativity teaches us, one of the very plainest is, not to despise (what the Prophet calls) the day of small things : that is, to be very exact about our duty even in matters which may at first sight seem trifling ; not knowing of how much consequence they may one day prove to that which is the greatest matter of all.

Think this well over, my brethren ; think whether you yourselves, since this time last year, have not had more or less reason to be quite sure that GOD's ways and thoughts are far higher and deeper than ours, if it be only in His bringing great matters out of what seem to us very small beginnings. I wish, too, many of us may not have to recollect this with bitter shame and remorse before HIM who reads their hearts, as having been guilty, within that time, of grievous sin owing to this very cause,—that they made light of small beginnings, and what they called trifling liberties, which they permitted themselves to take with GOD's Commandments. Oh ! if the unhappy lost souls could speak from the next world, or send a message, as that rich man in our LORD's parable wished to do, how certain we may be that they would warn us against the first trifling with the beginnings of mischief, the first scornful or idle neglect of what would be called little acts of goodness !

Let us think of these sad self-reproachings before it is too late for ourselves, and let us endeavour steadily to contemplate the great wonder of this day, the SON of GOD born of a woman, and laid, like another child, in the manger at Bethlehem ; with this prayer, among others, that our eyes may be opened to understand, in some measure, GOD's gracious and gentle beginnings with ourselves. As HE, our LORD and SAVIOUR Himself, from the very moment of His birth as on this day, never ceased loving us, and preparing all good things for us ; so never let us quite take off our thoughts from that, His unspeakable love, of which this day is the crown. It is such love as we never can fathom, never can come truly to understand ; but we may and shall understand more and more, as we turn our minds towards

it more earnestly. To watch and study CHRIST in His cradle is the very mystery of humility ; and if of humility, then of love, peace, and joy. It is the very preparation, the beginning of eternal happiness ; for in knowledge of HIM standeth our eternal life, and such knowledge must begin from His lowliness. JESUS Himself is that little child, like whom we must especially become, if we would be ever really fit for the kingdom of Heaven.

SERMON CXXVIII.

RETURNING TO GOD.

(PREACHED AT THE BEGINNING OF A NEW YEAR.)

MALACHI iii. 7.

“Return unto ME, and I will return unto you; saith the LORD of HOSTS. But ye say, Wherein shall we return?”

THIS is one of those verses which show most clearly and graciously the forethought of our heavenly Teacher, in providing for us the Old Testament; first, in that words spoken on a particular occasion to the Jews are made to convey a heavenly warning and message to Christians, of all generations, at all times. Secondly, in that ALMIGHTY GOD here, as in many other places, furnishes comfort and instruction beforehand to that bitterest of cares and doubts, the care and doubt which must hang over those, who feel that they have grieved His SPIRIT, received in baptism, by wilful sin, and having been partakers of the heavenly gift, have fallen away, and trodden CHRIST, His grace, His warnings, His example, under foot.

I say, these words of the prophet Malachi may with advantage be considered, as showing forth GOD’S love for His people in both these ways. As to the particular occasion on which they were spoken, it is easy to make that out, on comparing this prophecy of Malachi with the historical Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, written about the same time; and also from the Prophecy of Haggai. It is plain, there were bad seasons; they

suffered from drought, and blasting, and mildew, and from the dearth which came on in consequence: and they were tempted, under colour of their distress, to break the law of God in several ways. Some of them exacted usury and increase of their brethren, who came to borrow money of them; some even sold them for slaves; others withdrew the Levites' portion, or defrauded God of His tithe; and it is to these more particularly, that the prophet Malachi speaks in the text. "Even from the day of your fathers," saith God by him, "ye have gone away from Mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto ME, and I will return unto you; saith the LORD of Hosts. But ye say, Wherein shall we return?"

As if HE had said, Though you have left off worshipping other gods, and are therefore inclined to think yourselves better than your fathers, yet your conduct shows too clearly that you are their children, partakers of their profane heart. And whereas you are apt to say, Wherein have we gone astray? I will tell you. You have done that, which one would hardly have thought possible, for a creature to rob his CREATOR. "Will a man rob GOD? yet ye have robbed ME?" Here again they would say in their perverseness, "Wherein have we robbed THEE?" God therefore again prevents them, telling them it was in tithes and offerings: and the sin had gone very far; it was not one or two of them that had been guilty of it, but even that whole nation. And having told them their fault, HE answers their other question, how they should amend it, and return unto God. "Bring ye all the tithes into the store-house, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove ME now herewith, saith the LORD of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of Heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

Here then we see that on that special occasion, of a famine among the Jews, to punish them for withdrawing God's tithes—a matter which one would have thought had little enough to do with us Christians, so long after, and many of us not at all concerned with tithes in any way—in such a matter the heavenly Teacher has laid down a general law of His dealing with all sinners in all times. "Return unto ME, and I will return unto you." You who are My own people have gone astray like your fathers:

you have committed deadly sin ; you have robbed God ; you are cursed with a curse ; yet is not your case hopeless. You are like persons wrecked in the deep sea ; yet is there a plank for you to save yourselves upon ; true, earnest, bitter, continual repentance, and turning again to God. Do so in earnest, and HE will turn again to you. “Turn ye unto HIM from whom the children of Israel have deeply revolted.” “Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die, O House of Israel?” “Turn ye, even to ME, saith the LORD, with your whole heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning, and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God.”

These gracious invitations, taken from sundry prophets, (and there are many, many more of them,) are so many reasons for hope and consolation to those Christians,—alas! how many,—who have stained the covenant of their God with wilful, habitual, customary sin. The Old Testament is in this sense even more comfortable than the New. For the blessed promises and invitations of the New Testament are most of them plainly addressed to such as have not yet been made members of CHRIST; whereas the Catechism teaches, that we all have been made members of HIM by holy Baptism. The New Testament, except in a few instances, does not plainly or expressly speak of pardon, for those who have grieved the SPIRIT that sealed them. So much the more consoling is it to a thoughtful and contrite spirit, to find God so continually offering to His ancient people pardon and favour on their true repentance, however grievously they had broken His covenant. For His people, the Jews, were, as St. Paul says, an ensample, a pattern, type, or figure, of us ; and His dealings with their nation are tokens of the manner in which HE will deal with those, in whom personally He dwells by His SPIRIT. Therefore, when we meet with such promises as this in the text, “Return unto ME, and I will return unto you,” we have very great encouragement to believe, that they are intended for us backsliding Christians ; that if we presently, heartily, and deeply repent, then, whatever anguish of mind, or other suffering, we may have to go through before we come to the end, yet ours will not be an end unblessed : we may hope, through the merits and mercy of HIM, who will come to be

our Judge, not to be cast out of the Kingdom of Heaven, though we may not be more than the very least in it. Such is the refreshing and soothing, yet humbling, view of things, which we gain on comparing the awful sayings of the New Testament, concerning those who abuse God's grace, with the merciful tokens and intimations in the Old, that His people were pardonable on true repentance, even after grievous sin.

Now, who that thinks at all seriously of another world, can help thinking of his need of repentance, now at the beginning of a new year? Not to speak now of those, who have fallen during the past twelvemonth, into what all know to be great and deadly sin, such as uncleanness, theft, neglect of God's worship, drunkenness, loving and making lies; who is so clear from doing what he ought not, and from leaving undone what he ought, as not to tremble, when he recollects that the great Day is so much nearer at hand? Who then can be other than most thankful for such mild and merciful sayings, as "Return unto ME, and I will return unto you?" Who that knows any thing of the sad desolation of heart, when conscience tells us that we are in wilful sin, that the HOLY SPIRIT must therefore be withdrawing HIMSELF from us, that there is a cloud between us and the throne of grace, which intercepts our prayers:—(for it is written, "If I incline unto wickedness with mine heart, the LORD will not hear me:")—who that knows any thing of the bitterness of such thoughts as these, mingling with all the enjoyments of life, and casting a blight over the very kindness of our friends, making us feel unworthy of it all:—what Christian, I say, that knows any thing of a wounded conscience, can help welcoming with unspeakable gratitude, such openings and gleams of hope, so graciously permitted to appear, even to such as he is, in the Heaven which his own sins have clouded over to him? Who being such, can think enough even of that one single blessing, that God's Providence yet allows him to use the Psalms in worship, and make their words his own? When, for example, he meets with the words, "Create in me a contrite heart, O GOD, and renew a right spirit within me; Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy HOLY SPIRIT from me:" does not the thought come over him with a healing power, that if he were utterly cast off, as he deserves to be, GOD would not have put these words into

his mouth, nor have invited him by His Providence so to speak to HIM in prayer? And will not this encourage him to bear with a willing heart whatever sadness and affliction and purifying trials God may any how send upon him, if so be he may be set on the right hand, and hear the Judge absolving him at the last day?

So precious, such a friend in need, is this saying of ALMIGHTY God, one among very many like it; "Return unto ME, and I will return unto you; saith the LORD of Hosts." But the prophetic SPIRIT goes on to intimate, that many sinners would not so receive it. Instead of returning with their whole heart and life, according to the merciful invitation, they will make answer and say, "Wherein shall we return?"

This is a mode of speaking which we often find in the Jews of Malachi's time; and it is one of the many instances in which we must own that there is a remarkable resemblance between those times and our own. Thus in the very beginning of the prophecy, "I have loved you, saith the LORD; yet ye say, Wherein hast THOU loved us?" Again, when God reproves them for neglect of His fear and honour, they say, "Wherein have we despised Thy Name?" When HE charges them with polluted offerings, they say, "Wherein have we polluted THEE?" When HE says, "Ye have wearied the LORD with your words," they say, "Wherein have we wearied HIM?" And in another place, "Your words have been stout against ME, saith the LORD; yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against THEE?" In all these instances, you will perceive, the temper of mind and way of speaking is the same. Instead of submitting at once to God's reproof, they make answer, and pretend to argue the matter with HIM; they go on as if they did not understand what was said, as if their conscience did not smite them at all.

The reply in the text, "Wherein shall we return?" may be taken in the like sense, as if they who were reproved were not aware of any particular reason why they should be called to repentance. Or it may be understood in a milder and better meaning, as spoken by a person really in doubt, wishing to repent, but hardly knowing how to begin. Either way, it is a manner of speaking and thinking which one meets with

every day in our times : in our times, I say, more especially ; because the men of our times are, perhaps, remarkable for the same kind of notion of themselves, which prevailed in those to whom Malachi was speaking. They have a great notion of guiding themselves, and of knowing the meaning of every thing ; they value themselves on being, as they think, free from idolatry and superstition ; they are very jealous of letting God's ministers reprove them, especially about things concerning which their own conscience has not smitten them before. This is perhaps as common a disposition as any, among those who wish, more or less, to be reckoned religious and serious people in our time : and it is exactly represented by those Jews' peevishly or proudly saying to the preacher of repentance, "Wherein are we to return?"

Again, among better and more considerate persons, struck for the first time with the impropriety of any thing which they have been accustomed to do, or of leaving certain things undone any longer, it is not uncommon to hear the like question asked, although in very different tone and meaning. "Wherein shall we return? we feel that we have been somehow wrong; we clearly see that such and such things were of more consequence than we had thought; but we are so entangled with bad habits, and old companions, and a dim fear of further mistake, and a sort of awkwardness which hangs over us, not knowing how to begin our repentance, that we are utterly at a loss : do tell us which way to turn." And it may be observed that both these answers,—both the insolent and impenitent one, and that which expresses honest perplexity,—are commonly given in regard of those sins and duties, which it is most difficult to measure and put down in words exactly. In the spending of money, for example, all men know in general that they are neither to be covetous nor extravagant ; but it is not so easy to draw a precise line, and say, this or that was an instance of covetousness in such a person, or of extravagance in such another : and, therefore, when people are warned and reprov'd on this head, it is easy for the hardened conscience to reply, "Wherein have I been covetous or extravagant?" and not uncommon for the tender but ill-informed conscience, to feel in general that the warning is needed, that there has been some-

thing wrong, while yet the person is at a stand still, and does not see his way how to set out on a better road.

Now for the benefit of both sorts of answerers, God's wisdom has condescended to point out, by what follows in the Prophet, the right course to be pursued. The particular sin which he here reproves in them is their robbing God of His tithes; and when they say, "Wherein shall we return?" this is His Divine command: "Bring all the tithes into the store-house, that there may be meat in Mine house, and prove ME now herewith, saith the LORD, if I will not open the windows of Heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there be not room enough to receive it." That is, make a courageous effort, and force yourself to do those things which are most contrary to the particular sin against which conscience warns you. Do not stand waiting, and hesitating, and asking how you must set about the work of repentance, but at once begin exercising yourself, in whatever most contradicts the bad tendencies which you cannot help being aware of. If the evil spirit of impurity has at all laid hold of you, trifle not with it, but the very next opportunity you have, turn away your eyes and all your senses from that which you know is likely to corrupt them. If selfishness be your fault, force yourself to wait upon others. If you are inclined to high thoughts of yourself, turn steadily away from your own praise, in whatever form and shape it comes. And so in all other respects; and especially take care, what you do, not to do it by halves, but with a generous faith give up all to God, and prove HIM if HE will not bless you in so doing.

By way of conclusion, I will take an instance not very far from Malachi's: I will suppose that some man, during this year that is passed, has been guilty of the deadly sin of stealing, or otherwise unfairly making gain of what was other men's. To him God's command by the Prophet is clear. Never mind the shame, the pain, or the loss, of making full restitution of all you have taken. Restore it, if you can, with large amends: the Law of Moses said fourfold, and Zacchæus, the publican, we know did the same, proving thereby the sincerity of his repentance. Upon which our LORD gave him a special blessing, and declared that salvation was come to his house. If we would have at all the same kind of blessing, let us see to it that we follow his ex-

ample, and make full restitution of ill-gotten gains, as far as ever it can be brought about. Be not afraid of the shame, or the pain, or the want; think of God's blessing, think of CHRIST and His Holy Angels, well pleased to behold you from Heaven; think that there cannot be a likelier way of ensuring to yourself a happy new year.

But it may be, actual restitution is become impossible; as it too often justly happens to us, that even when we truly repent, we find the mischief we have done incurable: perhaps the person wronged is dead or far away, and we know not how to have any dealings with him, or you cannot exactly tell whom you wronged; and this I take to be a very common case, that people go on in some way of business, taking little unfair liberties in matters of selling and buying, labour and handicraft, until the sum of their gain, and of their sin too, is very large, and yet it would be hard for them to say, "So much was taken from this man, so much from that," and to make satisfaction accordingly. What are such to do? JESUS CHRIST in His great mercy has left them a plain way to the blessing of Zacchæus, or some good portion of it. HE is present among them, by His poor and needy, ready to receive their offerings, sincerely and humbly given, as true tokens of repentance: even as Zacchæus, besides restoring fourfold to those whom he could remember to have wronged, and who were within reach, gave also half his goods to the poor, by way of restitution of those many other unfair gains, which had helped him, as a heathen tax-gatherer, to become rich. Do you as he did, and a blessing will come to your house.

But perhaps it is out of your power to make restitution in this way either. You are too poor; or the wrongs you did your brethren were not in money matters, nor such as could be measured in money. Well, at least you may repent bitterly, you may confess your sin, you may punish yourself in many ways. You may warn those who have been so unfortunate as to fall within the reach of your ill-example; or, if they be gone, you may warn others: you cannot be too careful in watching to give no scandal, no temptation to sin, especially in the same way, to any who come near you. You can help them by good example, if in no other way; or, if the time be gone by for that, you can help them by prayer. And, last of all, you can take patiently, nay, I

will say thankfully too, whatever pain, sorrow, or disappointment, God sends on you for the punishment of those your old sins. You may say, not only with your lips, but with your heart, May I suffer more and more here, so I may be forgiven through Jesus CHRIST hereafter.

These things if we do, we may hope that the unspeakable Grace of God may fulfil in us, great as our backslidings may have been, that merciful saying, "Return unto ME, and I will return unto you." We may not at first feel the difference; we may not know how and when the light of His forgiving countenance begins to beam towards us again. But in time, even here, we may be able to trace it—like a path, as some one has said, over the mountains, becoming visible as we remove to a distance from it. And hereafter, should we be so happy as to attain that world, we shall own, with joy and wonder, that not one good thing of all the ALMIGHTY promised has failed to come to pass. Only let us begin courageously, and at once, and persevere humbly and patiently; for the journey is great for us, the time is short, and we, alas, are far behind.

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